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By JAMES BLACK, D.D.

Minister St. George's United Free Church, Edinburgh

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The Dilemmas of Jesus

By

JAMES BLACK, D.D.

Minister, St. George's United Free Church, Edinburgh

Author of "The Mystery of Preaching," "The Pilgrim Ship," etc.

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To
The Morning Congregation
of
St. George's United Free Church,
Edinburgh.

TO THE READER

My only Foreword may be perfectly summed up in the great sentence and prayer,

"Sir, we would see Jesus."

JAMES BLACK.

St. George's United Free Church, Edinburgh

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I

THE DILEMMA AT JORDAN

THE time was now ripe.

After the long years of quiet preparation,—a gracious boyhood and a clean stretch of working manhood, with many long thoughts and wonderings that must remain a sealed book to us—the soul of the Redeemer was stirring in the life of the Man. The mysterious bidding of God was working in Jesus to a clear issue and a great adventure.

Personally, I rejoice that we know next to nothing of His early days. It would be no gain for me to have a string of precocious incidents and sayings such as fond parents store in their memory regarding the budding genius of their children. I like that strong note of reticence, so unusual with us, where St. Luke remarks that His mother "kept all these sayings in her heart." Wise mother!

All that need be said about the grotesque accounts of His boyhood given so lavishly in the uncanonical writings is that they are as foolish as they are spurious. They were written no doubt to honour Him, according to the ideas of the age, but some of our attempts to honour Jesus may only defame

Him. They certainly defame Him when they are inventions.

As things are—and I for one am grateful—our Lord steps clear on to the stage of His ministry, as if He had just come straight from the presence of God. It is a spiritual gain to us that He has no past. Let us leave these thirty years to Himself, for they belong only to Him and to God. It is enough for us to know that the period of His youth and manhood was a dawning shaping time of wonder and resolve. Surely the world has more than it can ever grasp or understand in the three rich years of His active ministry. In an ideal sense, it is not Jesus the Boy, or Jesus the Workman, but Jesus the Christ with whom we are concerned. We know all that we need know.

The time was now ripe.

The long slow processes had at last fully gathered to a head, and Jesus felt definitely the urge of God. Unlike other gifted men, conscious of big possibilities within them, He had not been impatient at the prolonged delay, nor had He betrayed petulance regarding God's postponements. Though the Winter may have seemed unduly long, He had quietly stayed the coming of the Spring-time. Now that it had come, stretching Himself as a rested man awaking from sleep, He walked slowly out from the home and the carpenter's bench to the new adventure.

Perhaps that waiting was God's final test.

At this moment, He feels the thrill of His new-found gifts. God's whisper, so long deferred, has roused Him to a knowledge of two things—His work and Himself. Of the two it may well be that the discovery of Himself is the greater, for by it the other was conditioned.

We cannot know how or when it came, though we may well hazard the suggestion that John's clear message of the Kingdom served as one of the prongs of awakening. But we do know that the call has come,—at last. A sense of His own greatness stirs in Him,—a unique conception of His mission based on a unique conception of Himself.

Why need we wonder at this, even on a human level? I have met young men, poor triflers compared with Jesus, who with some little hot spluttering message in their heart, have felt themselves strangely aloof from the world. If we do not think it remarkable to see some young reformer thus exalted, why need we doubt that Jesus, with the full burden of God in His heart, should feel Himself at this moment strangely unique and supreme?

I emphasise this, and dwell on it, because of what follows. For it is Christ's uniqueness, majestically felt in His own heart, which creates this dilemma at Jordan.

I

For out there at the river, clothed like a hermit

and with the gaunt face of an ascetic, there was a young prophet, John the Baptist, working wonders, a man with a flaming message who feared no one but God.

The fierce preaching of this man had been portentous. He had stirred the Israel of his day, as few at any time had ever done. Men of all orders and ranks,—Pharisees and soldiers, taxgatherers and priests,—had flocked to him in fascinated wonder. He was a magnificent survival, a prophet after the days of the prophets, but with more than a prophet's motley crowd.

This diversity of his appeal is one of the proofs of his greatness. A stronger proof lies in the fact that he compelled his audience to come to him in the desert instead of his seeking them in the cities. But the clearest proof of all lies in this,—that though he was as elemental and characteristic as any man who ever preached, yet his personality was drowned in his message. St. Mark calls him "the voice of one crying in the wilderness." That is the finest tribute to a preacher ever recorded.

He was a great "voice" calling the world from its sin, and preaching the vehemence of God. The one note of his doctrine was *sin*—sin national and private, sin that cried to Heaven. The one demand of his preaching was *repentance*. "Ye are all a generation of vipers." This is the roll of muffled thunder. "*Bring forth fruits meet for repentance.*"

At this moment, he was at the height and crest

of his mission of cleansing. Though the mighty and the great came to his feet, he truckled to no man; but from them all, priest and publican alike, he demanded this one thing, repentance. They were all of them God's apostate people: and before he would baptise even the best of them, they must first baptise themselves in their own purifying tears.

"Repent!" "Repent!"

It was a Baptism of Repentance,—that only.

II

How would Jesus, unique in His own soul and conscious of no need such as John exacted, relate Himself to a message like this?

It is easy to understand the difficulty as it touched our Lord.

If this crusade of John was purely a Baptism of Repentance, Jesus, whom no person could convict, could not accept. He acknowledged sin to no man. Whether we admit this or not, it is at least a clear note of His own consciousness. He is the only man in history who never acknowledged sin without being called a hypocrite or a self-deceiver. "Which of you convicteth me of sin?"

How then would a pure soul like Jesus treat the Baptism of John?

Even although God was evidently working His own wonders through this man in His own way, yet the gate through which the prophet called the nation to God was the narrow gate of repentance.

With no consciousness of need in His own heart, could Jesus stoop to enter in?

There were one or two courses open to Him which might have agreed with His uniqueness, and in human eyes might even have seemed to enhance it.

(*a*) So far as He Himself was concerned, He might have said, "This ministry of repentance is salvation for these needy people, but of course, it cannot in any way apply to me. By God's love, I come to my great work with a stainless heart. Having nothing to confess, I need no cleansing tears."

Thus, in His own feeling of purity, He might easily have neglected this ministry of John. In no sense had it any concern with Him or any bearing on His own fortunes. We can easily picture Him standing aloof, no doubt with a sincere benediction, but yet regarding it as something that had no imaginable relation to Him. In every good sense, He might have felt Himself "above" it.

In one view—a good view—that course of conduct might have established and indeed enhanced His uniqueness in our eyes. Some of us might have praised God that Jesus felt Himself divinely superior to such a message as this Baptism.

(*b*) Again, He might have advanced further and argued, on the positive side, that though John's

ministry had served its own day superbly, yet since He Himself had now appeared, its day was done.

John's preaching was a beautiful relic of the past,—the past that was now swallowed up for ever in the glorious present. The Baptist had only foretold that the Kingdom was coming: Jesus announced that at last the Kingdom had come. Thus in a quiet but assured way, He might have brushed John's baptism aside, as an obsolete thing, good in itself, no doubt, but now finally superseded. The Prince's herald retires when the Prince appears.

To some minds also, such an attitude might have been fully consistent with His uniqueness and might even have seemed to enhance it.

(*c*) Yet again, with His own soul hot with God's full vision, He might not only have slurred and neglected John's Baptism, but might easily have opposed and decried it.

In His eyes, admittedly, that ministry of John was an imperfect thing. It was a great half-truth. It proclaimed only aspects of God and aspects of sin. Is it not our duty to smash imperfect things, lest they lure simple souls from the biggest and the best?

Moreover, for some time to come, John was certain to be a faint rival of Jesus, and might draw some seeking souls from His sway. For the sake of His own unique work, it might be better there-

fore to trample John's ministry in the dust and break his influence. This is a common way with the big men of history: they prove their own power by breaking their rivals.

Some of us might well think that this was the perfect way for Christ to prove His uniqueness.

III

That was what He might have done, as we see it in our pitiful worldly wisdom.

What did He do?

Bidding His mother and brethren farewell, He walked out of Nazareth one summer morning along the dusty ways and through the scrubby hills, making for the pools of Jordan. He joined the throng of troubled seekers whose anxious feet had beaten paths like sheep-tracks through the rough country. He mingled humbly with this pilgrim mob until they brought Him to the motley concourse at the river. There He stayed all day, watching with His loving eyes this great sacrament of a people's awakening and cleansing. Then, as twilight gathered and the weary people trudged homewards,—some, praise God, with lighter hearts,—Jesus, "when all the people were baptised," went up to John.

Quietly and yet with a note of authority He asked to be baptised. There, alone with the silent stars, He faced the weary preacher.

Sir, I would be baptised of thee.

What took place thereafter was a subtle tribute to Jesus and John.

It was a tribute to Jesus in that it shows how, then and always, men came under the magic sway of His personality. They might hate Him: they might love Him. They might fear Him: they might trust Him. But one and all, then as now, were forced to admit the majesty and compulsion of His character. Whatever John may have known about Him, he felt this constraining power.

It was a tribute to John also in that he, an approved man on the crest of the wave, recognised in this humble relative of his the final messenger of God. I think this is John's biggest moment. There are no blinkers for the eyes so deadly as a near kinship! We are so ready to acknowledge great qualities in some stranger, while we only smile indulgently at our own brother! One may be too near to things to see them in their true focus.

IV

To John's shamed protest that he should presume to baptise Jesus, our Lord made a reply that is now one of the great sentences of literature. "*It becometh us to fulfil all righteousness.*"

In undergoing this Baptism of John, needless to say, Jesus did not confess sin. It was not with tears but a solemn and assured joy that He went through the service. But in that great sentence of

explanation He gave us the compelling reason that led Him to take this step,—how He, though conscious of no need, should undergo a Baptism of Repentance.

By the message of this sentence He gloriously solved His own dilemma. "What relation shall I have to John? What attitude shall I take to his crusade of repentance?" With this sentence on His lips, "it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness," He stepped into the low water of the pool.

Sir, I would be baptised of thee.

V

Why did He do it?

Even if our words be but broken guesses at truth, it may help us if we express them. We need not profess to understand the motives that moved a pure soul like Jesus, but in that sentence of His He left the door of His heart a little ajar.

Did He hope perhaps that some of us might peep within?

1. At the outset, with serious purpose, He thereby aligned Himself with everything He knew to be good. He greeted God whenever He saw His shadow.

For Him, without doubt, this Baptism of John had serious faults: it was far from perfect. But, on the other hand, it was the one thing in that age that stood out unmistakably for God and good. So He quietly overlooked the defects in it that were

personal to Him, and publicly identified Himself with this crusade for righteousness. He seemed to reason that even if *He* did not need this baptism of repentance, there were millions who did!

I find in this a gracious guidance for myself in countless things.

I look, for instance, at the modern Church. As I examine this institution, I become pitifully aware of its faults. It is a broken thing, so broken that many a passer-by reviles it openly. It may have gold in it—no doubt it has—but sometimes I see only a mighty mass of dross. I question if any one can criticise the faults of the Church, as a serious-minded minister can. The shortcomings, the failures, the open contradictions, the meagreness of our love and life, the wretched contrast between profession and practice,—sometimes, as I look at the Church, I see only its ghastly shortcomings.

What shall I do with it then?

Stand outside and shake its dust from my feet? Neglect it because I do not need it? Denounce it because it is so imperfect? Judge it not by its attainments but by its failures?

Or shall I steal up like Jesus, and line up like Jesus, knowing all its imperfections but knowing also that it is the one clear thing in this bleak world of ours that stands for God and goodness? Like Him, shall I take my part in it even though I could criticise it? Yes, I could criticise it, none better! But may it not be the big thing, and the Christian

thing, simply to enter in and take my saving share in its work?

I feel the same with every scheme of reform that is pressed on my notice. How inadequate they all are! Any child can see their faults and blemishes.

Here, for instance, is some temperance reform. But ah! have you noticed how inadequate it is, and how open it is to criticism? If I set my mind to it, I could tear a thousand gaping holes in its side.

Here again is some social reform. But the injustices that are wrapped up with it! The inadequacies of its provisions! The loopholes through which a hundred scoundrels may work their evil will! How can a man, with any self-respect, take part in these schemes that are so full of patent shortcomings?

In all these things, I love the way my Master did.

No one could have criticised this inadequate Baptism of John more than He. No one indeed had less need of it than He. But He stepped into the water of Jordan, and said, "Sir, I would be baptised of thee." For He saw a little bit of God in this crusade of the preacher, and taking His lance in His hand, He marched with the crusaders.

2. I said that He aligned Himself with everything that was good and worthy. In as serious a sense, He now aligned Himself with everything that was evil and worthless.

The evil of the world—especially in that thing we call *sin*—is gathered up in us. When Jesus stepped into Jordan, He ranged Himself by our side: for He joined Himself to the great company of the afflicted people of His day. He entered into a glorious community, a solidarity, with such broken and defeated souls as we are.

This is one aspect of the baptism which no wise man will dare forget. It shows us in a wonderful symbolism the quality of the Lord we serve. He did not need this Baptism. *But I do!* And He is standing now where I stood.

What shall I call this gracious act?

I dare not call it "condescension." That suggests a picture of some superior person conscious of the praiseworthiness of his act. I call it rather the *identity of sympathy*. The genius of true sympathy is that it stands, humbly and fully, where its object stands.

Our Lord did this. Do we?

With us, a sense of uniqueness always separates. We stand apart in our lordly greatness. But Christ's greatness only led Him to identify Himself with us. It is true that He entered into our experiences in all ways: but this deed at the river is His greatest act of identity.

See Him now, standing in the low water, just where all the needy folk had confessed their sins.

Our Lord did this. Do we?

I observe that as soon as any one of us feels a

note of distinctness we stand off in mental isolation. Superiority with us means aloofness. A little learning—and we feel strangers with the ignorant! A touch of birth—and one would think we were of another order of clay! Some wealth—and we feel as if we could buy souls like bricks! Human greatness is human pride.

There He is standing in the water of Jordan.

An hour before, I saw a crowd of needy souls standing in the same place.

One with God. One with us.

3. Again, in this act, I consider that Jesus linked Himself definitely with all the honourable past.

John was the last of the prophets, a pathetic survival of great days. He was of the order of Elijah and Amos, and in message and methods alike, he was of their breed.

With new light in our hearts, it is so easy, so tempting, sometimes so cheap, to condemn the past. In our modern literature, every young, callow Georgian discourses with a sneer of the age of Queen Victoria. In fact, we all speak patronisingly of the past,—until it is sufficiently past! Then when it becomes decrepitly ancient, we fall on our knees and worship it.

Jesus had a better right than any to say, "The best things in the past are now swept out. I begin a new era. Men formerly groped blindly for God: I bring them God Himself. Every truth in the past

is now grandly superseded. Perhaps, in order to show how new and searching my message is, I should treat John as if he were an anachronism."

He might have said that.

Instead, He definitely linked Himself, publicly, with this last of the prophets. In asking for the benediction of John's Baptism, He linked Himself with every good thing that men had struggled for through days of sorrow and blunder.

I would learn from my Master this beautiful secret.

Our age, except in certain churchy circles which live in undiluted medievalism, is in grave danger of despising the past and trying to cut itself adrift from its influence. I do not know much of Bolshevism. Who does? The fault is not ours, for the Bolshevists have left us to judge their creed by their actions: and these, I fear, are not savoury. But so far as I understand it, I have one quarrel with this creed. It believes that it can only remedy the present and save the future by cutting itself wholly adrift from the past. It seems to believe that everything in the past has been worthless and rotten. Therefore let the past go; for it has no experience or lesson that can help a modern man! The one way to build a new society is to raze everything to the ground and start afresh.

I believe in progress. In spite of all the muddle of life, I believe in progress. But I do not believe in disconnected progress. I believe in new things.

But I do not know of any new thing that has not sprung from older things, as a flower evolves from seed. If the creed of the Bolshevist advocate represents a universal smash of everything, social or religious, that has its roots in the past, his ideal action is to put a revolver to his own head. For the Bolshevist, like every one of us, is the greatest embodiment of the accumulated heredities of ageless strivings.

The only future worth having is a future that honours the past, and indeed grows out of it. I like my Master's way in this. He set out, more than any one ever did, to revolutionise life and religion. But I praise God that His first great act was to step into Jordan and link Himself with John, the last of the prophets. In acknowledging the Baptist, He acknowledged the long processes of which he was the crown.

4. Still further, our Lord's act is a gracious benediction on every good convention, and a recognition of all customs or rites that exhibit a bit of God.

We think that the more original a man is, the more should he be expected to despise ordinary ways and strike out on lines of his own. Indeed we regard it as a mark of "bigness" that a man should be unconventional. I admit that the fresh eye of genius often sees how hollow and empty conventional ways may be. We become so used to

our fashions of life that we do not notice how hollow they ring.

It may be equal to a revelation, sometimes, to shake ourselves out of ancient and accepted modes. Otherwise, life would be dominated, and cursed, by convention.

Yet I cannot but think that every good man should seriously consider his relation to all established practices and canons of conduct. It is so easy, and so foolish, to despise them. But it may be a bigger and finer thing to honour good observances than to imagine ourselves beyond them. It was a mark of greatness even for such an original soul as Jesus to say "It becometh us to fulfil all righteousness."

We soon learn that life runs, and must run, in conventions: and if a convention lives at all, it is because it has some real contribution of goodness hidden in its heart. In mock superiority, shall we kick these things aside? We do not need them, perhaps,—but do others? All strong men show the quality of their strength by remembering those who are lame.

I may say, for instance, that the formal and conventional methods of Sabbath observance need not apply to me, for I try to observe the day of God in spirit. Why should I be bound by this hoary convention?

I may do one of two things—go my own way, as Jesus might have done, had He cared; or go the

way that helps others, and so fulfil all righteousness. I cannot help comparing the petty little ways of some human soul in revolt with the way of my Lord. Though He was as original as the very breath of God, He said so simply, "*It becometh us to fulfil all righteousness.*"

Thus He settled His dilemma at Jordan.

He considered that the least in the Kingdom of God was greater than John. But He ranged Himself by the side of the prophet.

Sir, I would be baptised of thee.

Such a Lord!

II

THE DILEMMA IN THE DESERT—

(A) THE ANGUISH

N that notable decision at Jordan, Jesus had both humbled and consecrated Himself,—perhaps the one a means and condition of the other.

Thereafter, as an electric current may thrill silent machinery into throbbing motion, He became conscious of the invasion of God's power in new ways and new measures. The great engine of His soul began to move!

That power flooded Him like the opening of a sluice-gate, as soon as He answered God's call fully and unreservedly. Indeed it seems to us as if the experience of the Baptism awoke Him to new issues almost as one is roused from sleep. So large a part does the consecration of this service play in His life, that it is not too much to say that He entered the water of Jordan as Jesus the carpenter, and left it as Jesus the Christ. In His own heart, if we may judge from what followed so startlingly, the one thing of which He was supremely conscious as the outcome of this experience was *power*.

This fact brought Him face to face with His second dilemma.

For in its very nature, this strange power which now invaded His soul was like a two-edged sword. It gave Him at once a sense of quiet assurance and a suggestion of danger,—peace and questioning. All true revelation acts like this. On the one hand, it thrills us and brings its own drive and passionate energy. But with the elation, a wise man is equally conscious of danger, the danger of excess and misuse. . . . In regard to Christ's special danger, I question if any single thing in human life has been so frequently and ruinously misapplied as power.

Having this gift of power, as yet untried and unmastered, He has now to face the question how He will use it for His high purpose. For instance, could the end justify the means, any means, so long as the end itself was secured? Could He establish His Kingdom by any expression of this power other than the highest?

This strong confidence within him came immediately from God: that was undoubted. But a God-like gift may be misused and perverted, even when it is apparently used for God's ends. Indeed, it is this "perversion of the best" that is always the worst. Consider, for instance, what it is that revolts us in all religious persecution. I think our disgust lies here,—that this persecuting zeal is a

sincere passion for God and God's truth, ruinously misused! It represents power and passion completely perverted.

Thus our Lord has now to settle how He will apply this divine power, that has come to Him like a sudden dawn.

We read that the agony and conflict of this question drove Him distracted into the desert. He felt that He must be with Himself and God to think it all out. This flight to the wilderness is one of the most natural touches of our Lord's humanity. Every great soul, before or since, has fled there. Perhaps, every great soul has found itself there.

He would not be bone of our bone in any true sense did He not take with Him into that desert a tortured soul. Possibilities, both of plan and method, had risen before His mind like beckoning ghosts. The clash and appeal of warring ideals were a real agony in His soul. The scene itself is a proof of this.

He had so many things to settle,—His own self-discipline, His inward loyalties, and a line of direction for His work. For these powers within Him carried their own danger. He might use them selfishly, thoughtlessly, arrogantly, or mischievously. Or He might use them for the pure glory of God and the need of man, even though He Himself might suffer in doing so. Power to light or

scorch: power to curse or bless! . . . It is the eternal dilemma of all power.

It was a lonely struggle. To Him, as to us, temptation is an experience of desperate loneliness. Even when it is fought out amid thronging crowds, it creates its own desert.

"The mind is its own place: and in itself
Can make a Heaven of Hell, a Hell of Heaven."

Before we watch Him in this lonely experience, I should like to make some comments on the general situation. I make them for two reasons,—to clear away some defaming misconceptions of this scene, and especially, to show how real this experience was in His own soul.

I

It was real. Otherwise it has no business in this record.

The temptation-setting may suggest at first a scene from a staged drama. It may even appear artificial with its questioning Satan. But it is none the less the drama of a soul and the picture of an agony. We need not imagine anything either seen or heard, but something felt: for it was not an outward demonstration but an inward anguish.

However formal or fanciful the details of the scene may appear, it was of pure necessity an inward experience: for temptation must actually

insert itself as an attractive thing into the tempted mind, before it can be real in any sense. He Himself thought it so real, and remembered it afterwards with so much poignancy, that He told it in later days in this flashing way to His disciples. For Him it was an unforgettable memory!

I shall speak of this more fittingly in the following chapter. Meanwhile our duty is to observe that He was genuinely tempted, torn as with devils, as any one of us may be. Whatever it does, this dramatic scene reveals the man Jesus battling for His own soul, and battling as we do. Indeed, the whole motif of the scene is to show that it *was* a battle.

I cannot help thinking that any theory of this struggle that makes Him more than a man in the powers He employed, makes Him less than a man. For such a view awards Him the victory through unnatural means, supernatural devices of which you and I in our conflicts can never make use. Moreover, if He needed these unnatural means to aid Him in His resistance, His victory was not His own, and in its moral value was really less than the victory of any boy who in his own and God's strength resists a theft and stands for honour.

Either Jesus fought His own devil here as I do mine—in His own strength and by communion with God—or He is no saviour for me. His victory, if

secured by means beyond my power and resources, would not help me, but would be a tragic mockery of my passion. The man who would help me by his example must stand wholly where I stand and fight as I fight.

That Christ did so is beyond all question.

I like these words in the record where it says that after His victory the angels ministered unto Him. *After His victory,* thank God! There is nothing magical in that, for I find that these gracious angels do the same for me,—*after my victory!* Also, thank God!

Could Jesus fall?

Why not?

Unless this temptation is a mere phantom of what temptation may be, unless Christ's contest is only a make-belief and not a staggering reality, unless this is a staged scene and so ultimately a farce, there is no other conclusion. Any idea of His sinlessness that excludes the possibility of His sin or the choosing of alternatives, makes it an achievement of no moral worth. If I am good simply because I cannot be anything else, of what moral value is my goodness? We dishonour Jesus and His victory by some of our hesitant theories. He might have denied God—but He didn't. He might have denied Himself—but He didn't.

This is the majesty of His Sonship.

This is the ground of His Saviourhood.

II

Not only was Jesus genuinely tempted, but He was always tempted.

I protest against the constant use of the definite article in describing this scene,—*The Temptation*—as if this were the only one Christ ever endured, or as if He dealt here so sweepingly with the issues of His life and ministry, finally and for good, that He was never tempted again. Were that the case, He would, once more, be utterly different from us: and being different, He would be no Saviour for us. In our life, when we are tempted, we may with agony settle some matter as He did, with signal victory. But the victory is never complete or final, for we are tempted again in the same point tomorrow. Our decision is a series of decisions.

No doubt there is a forgotten but gracious truth in the fact that one clear ringing answer makes the next answer easier. There is such a thing as the guarding peace of a strong decision. Without any question, Christ's unqualified answer settled His temptation with the blow of a firm refusal.

But a stricken enemy rises again. That Jesus won here does not alter the fact that He, like us, was tempted again, and always tempted. Why! almost at the end, in that grim scene of Gethsemane, He faced one of these precise temptations again,—if, by any chance, the cup might pass from Him, and He might use His power to save Himself from the shame of the cross.

He was tempted till the day He died—tempted, perhaps, most in dying: and like us, He had to watch His own soul with unwinking vigilance and ceaseless prayer.

He was in all points tempted like as we are.

III

It is of great spiritual profit to notice when Christ was tempted.

Is it an accident that this scene is placed at this precise point in the narrative? Might it equally, for our profit, be placed anywhere else? I believe that it stands here in its true psychological sequence.

Some people assert that the Temptation scene represents later experience on the part of Jesus. Is it likely that in the radiant opening of His ministry He would be tempted in these gross ways? This surely is later experience, representing subsequent temptation, but gathered here in this convenient and telling fashion.

There are two fatal errors in this. One is an error of interpretation. The temptations in the wilderness are *not* gross, but only spiritual. The second is an error of judgment and insight. I believe that the Temptation stands here in its true place, chronologically and psychologically. This is the time when it happened, because this is the time when it must have happened!

Recall what had taken place.

He had felt the call and stir of God to enter on His ministry. He had settled His first dilemma by humbly undergoing the Baptism of John. With a great and wonderful exaltation of soul, He had realised that the long-awaited hour had come. It is then, just then, after the uplift of His call and the consecration of His Baptism, that Jesus is supremely tempted. This is true to the experience of our life, and it links Him with all human nature.

What may that fact imply?

It means surely that He is tempted on two aspects of one great experience,—on the one hand, its great exaltation, when He is lifted up on wings; or on the other hand, in its reaction, when the soul descends again and walks the dusty ways of the world.

Surely we can understand this, and even link ourselves with Him in this experience. Personally, I do not know any more dangerous moments for us than these,—the moment of conscious thrill and power, and the moment of natural rebound and reaction.

Let us consider the first of the two.

I have heard people suggest that the hour of a man's greatest temptation is when he is " down and out," when he is broken on the wheel, when things are against him, when he is fighting desperately just to hold his own, fighting, it may be, even for the food he needs. I do not minimise that danger. Anyone who has been " down " like that knows that

there are queer insinuating temptations that rap imperiously at the gate of the soul.

But I hold—I think I am right—that there is something in the average man that keeps him strong in such a situation,—an element of tenacity, even mere pugnacity, that makes him shut his teeth and hold on. Like Job in his similar distress, he believes that the scheme of things is gravely wrong, and he desires passionately to justify himself. His very anger may be a moral protection.

But a man is more off his guard in his elation than in his despair. In his despair, he constantly thinks of himself, sometimes nothing but himself. That is his safety. But in his elation, he forgets himself. That is his danger.

If you ask any young man about this, he will put you right. Or if you can, probe your half-forgotten memories, and they will tell you. When is a young man's danger? Is it not when he is at the top of his bent, when his blood runs hot and red, when he stretches his body in the glorious excess of conscious strength, when he feels, as Christ felt, the sheer mastery and mystery of power. It is then that most of us play the fool. If I may say it reverently, that is when Christ was tempted,—when He, too, stretched His arms in new and awful strength!

His moment of danger is ours.

Or it may be the other side of this experience,—

when the elation has passed, as all emotions must, and one is in the natural reaction of the strain.

By this time, Christ's early wonder and consciousness of dawning power had passed. He had undergone that emotional struggle regarding John's Baptism and the consecration of the service itself. He had settled His dilemma, and had given Himself fully to God in the deep experience of the Baptism. He had heard God whisper to His soul, and in vision had seen the Heavens opened, and had gazed into the eyes of His Father.

The experience was now over.

Like us, He had to drop back to the level of His daily life and ministry. I said the "level," —but does anyone ever drop back immediately to the level? Do we not rather sink a little below it, like the swing of a pendulum before it comes to rest?

All experience warns us of that moment of tired reaction. There are few things just so exhausting as emotional exaltation, and consequently, few things so dangerous. After the excitement has waned, we pay the penalty for any true emotional output. We become the slaves of our own depression, with its reproachful fears and defaming temptations. Evil so often catches us on the rebound.

I am glad to think that this was as true of Jesus as of me. I believe that the experience of the Baptism carried with it a moment like this. Jesus is

linked with us in the very naturalness of such an event. His moment of danger is ours.

If we watch that moment as He did, and commit it to God as He did, we may also find a way of victory like Him.

IV

There is gain also in considering the manner and fashion in which our Lord was tempted.

His contest came to Him quite definitely and clearly along the individual line of His own peculiar powers. It is a commonplace, but none the less far-reaching, to say that His type of temptation could never be ours, just as ours could never be His. We are each tempted along the peculiar line of our own vocation, our own gifts, and our own temperament. Christ's temptation, for instance, was purely concerned with His own work. Perhaps that is one reason why we shall never understand its especial poignancy to Him, as in a lesser degree we never understand the plea and appeal of our brother's temptation. I find that I can always overcome another man's difficulties, as he might smile at mine. It is my own that seem hardest, because, as with Jesus, they are special to me.

It is foolish to think, therefore, that because these temptations of Jesus seem easy to us, they were easy to Him. Any one of us might smile at the suggestion to cast ourselves down from a pinnacle of the Temple to dazzle a multitude. But Jesus

could well smile at our temptation to cheat or tell a lie! He was tempted along His own special line: and we are tempted along ours. Let this remembrance only make us the more reverent and gentle with some other man's debate, at which we might feel inclined to sniff with contempt. No doubt he might return the contempt if only he knew the thoughts and dreams that haunt our minds.

V

As I see Jesus in the toils, I think it is worth saying, for the comfort of many, that Temptation in itself is no sin.

I have found that this matter of Temptation perplexes many good people, and especially perplexes many sensitive young people. As I look at Jesus, I think it is worth repeating, "Temptation in itself is no sin."

I cannot emphasise this enough for the sheer commonsense and sanity of our religious life. People have come to me with words like these,—"I am in plain despair about myself. I try to live as much like my Lord as I can: but do what I will, at some unguarded moment, wretched thoughts steal into my mind, and not only pollute my heart but ruin my peace and happiness. Am I an evil thing that these gaunt spectres steal into my thoughts? Is there anything wrong or foul in me, that these masterless dreams master me? Am I tainted be-

cause in spite of myself I think these thoughts and dream these dreams?"

This is no fancied difficulty. It is real, hideously real, to many sensitive and pure-minded souls. The more pure-minded we are, the greater is our difficulty. May I answer the question simply by pointing you here to Jesus?

We believe that He was without stain. But we know that He was not without temptation! Either temptation in itself is no sin, or else Jesus was not without sin. But the big human fact of the gospels is that Jesus *was* tempted, tempted indeed in such agony as you and I can never comprehend, tempted till the sweat stood on His brow like drops of blood. He was tempted in all points as we are, yet without sin.

It is our Christian duty to aim at a clean soul, and especially at some self-mastery of our own vagrant thoughts. By discipline and watchfulness, we believe it is possible, in Jesus, to attain to this great ideal. By His aid, we may gradually make our minds a home for chaste and worthy things just as by the reverse we may make them a little painted hell.

That is all true. A clean mind and heart may indeed be the beautiful reward of daily faithfulness. But none the less it needs to be said that temptation is as natural to us as it was to Jesus: and in itself it is no sin. Our very gift of thinking, the more it discharges its own function and weighs or con-

siders possibilities, brings temptation in its train. This we cannot escape, nor is it desirable that we should. Temptation is the obvious penalty of a great privilege, the genius of which lies in debating opposites.

I venture these two remarks.

On the one hand, remember that daily resistance ends by bestowing a sure mastery and builds up reserve strength.

On the other hand, the only sin in temptation is when we play or sport with its suggestion, when we caress it, fondle it, coquette with it, and finally, when we succumb. Sin enters when we slacken the curb, and let go the rein.

Jesus was tempted.

Jesus did not fall.

VI

The source of Christ's victory lay in an unfailing reliance on God.

Have you observed that on each occasion Jesus slew His temptation with a text, as a hunter uses a particular bullet for his gun? That does not mean that texts are magical or will do their own work independently of us. But it does suggest how richly and intimately Christ leant back on the known records of God's mind and how He steeped Himself in God's spirit. The Bible may save no one, as a priest may save no one: for both may be equally outside of us. But it is true to say that if

the word of God is in our hearts, it will give all needed light, courage, and direction: and out of it, as from a divine magazine, a man may draw some bullets that may slay the suggestions of his own soul.

The secret is to know God's mind, walk in His plain ways, and lean heavily on His strength.

Thus alone did Jesus pass through His anguish.

III

THE DILEMMA IN THE DESERT—

(B) THE VICTORY

E have considered the general conditions of this amazing struggle in the desert, where Jesus fought for His own soul and His own ideas of Himself, as a man battles with a strong enemy who wills his death.

As we saw, this scene is in no sense a dramatic allegory picturesquely told, or a piece of idealised experience cast into an imaginary form for literary appeal. Jesus is too simple and sincere to be guilty of invention or to play for artistic effect.

The incident represents a fierce agony where His soul was torn with its own desires and allurements, a thing of sweat and blood, an experience that lay like a searing memory on His heart. In later days He spoke of it to His disciples to show them the depths through which He had waded to victory, and also to give them the inspiration of His own contest and triumph. Even then, in the after-look, the whole experience was so living and vivid to Him that He threw the story into this dramatic

form as being the only way in which the thing could be pictured as the titanic struggle it was.

We noted, also, that in the last resort temptation is wholly an inward event. If evil is to be real to us, it cannot be merely hypothetical, but must enter the mind as a possible seduction.

This was fully true of Jesus.

Each line of conduct which He debated and rejected must have presented itself to His mind with some attractiveness. "Satan o'ercomes none but by willingnesse." Each represented, at least, a possible alternative. Otherwise, there would be no agony here, and the scene itself would not be worth recording. It *is* worth recording just because it shows us Christ's soul in its seething turmoil. For our good,—and that we might know the kind of Master we serve—He expressed His inner experience in this flashing manner.

The wicked thing that He faced was so overpoweringly real and menacing that He pictured it as a personal antagonist who sought to argue His soul into Hell. When all is said, that represents the final truth. In any case, it is right to say that one who knows temptation as Jesus knew it, knows also that in its essence evil is a personal spirit. Satan becomes brutally real to agonised souls.

I ask you now to consider the dilemma that faced Jesus in the heart of this scene.

What was this dilemma?

If my judgment then was right, I showed you what the Baptism meant for Him. It was a token and proof of His full awakening to God's call, His own mission, and the powers that lay slumbering in Him. During and after the Baptism, as one might touch a secret spring, these powers broke loose in Him, summoned into consciousness by the majesty of the experience in His own heart. A big revelation is always a kind of superb intoxication, an inspiration that may produce a spiritual metabolism as real as the change from the grub to the chrysalis. These powers, thus stirred, surged through Him as the blood flows through our veins. He was conscious, as never before, of the dominant force of God within Him. He awoke to a knowledge of majestic power.

The circumstances in which He faced His dilemma seem to me to agree with the nature of the dilemma itself. I like that reference in St. Mark—"*He was with the wild beasts.*" There could be no fitter companions for Him at that moment than these beasts of the wilderness. They represented rapacious and unhallowed power, whose only motive was passion and the indulgence of desire, uncontrolled by reason or pity.

This suggests one unvarying temptation of power, to which indeed countless men have succumbed for the world's curse. If I understand our

Lord's debate aright, the question for Him centred here—"How shall I use my power?" He felt that He dare not wield the weapon in His hands, until He had defined the spirit and the aims for which He would stand.

Would His power be hallowed or unhallowed? Like God, or like these wild beasts?

This is His dilemma.

The three temptations that assailed Him so fiercely are concerned solely with the possible misuse of power. He had now His work to do. He had now the needed power to do it. How would He handle His power, this unique endowment?

As I read the meaning of this strange scene, He was tempted here to employ His power in three suggested ways. He might misuse it *for His own good.* He might misuse it *for the good of others.* He might misuse it *for the good of God.*

I use the word "good" deliberately. I believe that the subtlety of the temptation lies in the fact that there was no evil in any of the suggestions. Each represented a just and honourable use of His powers, against which there could be no reasonable reproach. A good use, not an evil! A good use, but not the best! Here, as always, it is the "merely good" that is the enemy of the best. Jesus was not deciding between the low and the high, but between the high and the highest.

I

After His long debate and self-scrutiny, our Lord awoke to the stinging fact that He was hungry.

Have you experienced what a commanding and imperious thing hunger is? I question if there is anything that slashes the veneer from men and women like desperate hunger. It stirs the tiger in us, out for its kill.

Christ was hungry.

He had been so absorbed for days,—as I have seen people so absorbed in sorrow,—that He had felt no need or desire for food. Then in this desolate place, miles from anywhere, He suddenly awoke to the fact that He was starving.

At a moment like this a man will do anything merely to appease the pangs of nature, even eat dried grass and munch sticks like a ravenous camel. Hunger has literally changed the face of the world. It has sent droves of gaunt-faced Goths and Mongols, rolling like waves, to swamp the most ancient civilisations. Hunger has been the world's master.

I can imagine what took place.

Dazed with His long fast and His absorption in debate, Jesus looked weariedly around. His eyes lit on some stones scattered loosely at His feet. At first He looked at them as though not seeing them. Then a curious startling temptation edged itself into His mind, as by a kind of natural suggestion.

Most of us know the fantastic fashion in which some stones may resemble the flat Eastern cakes His own mother must often have made on her simple griddle in the home at Nazareth. With a kind of reminiscent smile, picking one of them up, Jesus may well have said, "Would that it were indeed one of my mother's cakes!"

Then still lovingly reminiscent, "One of my mother's cakes! . . . Why! I can taste them now!"

Then the temptation flashed into His heart like a spasm of pain.

"Why not make this stone in my hand bread? I feel God's creative power within me. Let me test it for my own pain. To satisfy hunger is a noble and just thing. Why should I not use God's endowment of grace to appease my appalling need, lest I drop here and perish with faintness? . . . Besides, this will be a decisive test whether I truly possess these powers I feel within me!"

The temptation was so acute and the need so imperious that He heard a voice, as you and I have heard a voice, saying, "The stones, Jesus, the stones!"

"Make them bread! You will surely die here in this desert, a mock Christ, unless you do. . . . And may it not be your duty to test your new endowment—here in this place, where no eye can see

you if you fail? You must surely prove it sometime. Why not here, lest when you try it before people, you fail and be laughed at?"

"The stones, Jesus, the stones! . . . What is wrong with it?"

There was nothing wrong with it. That is the appeal of the temptation. To save life and satisfy dominant need would have been an honourable and seemly use of His gifts. This is the crux of His dilemma—that the act would have been *a clean use of power!*

Why did He refuse?

Have you seen the beauty of this magnificent refusal? Let me tell you why He refused. *He refused for me.* He would never have been my Saviour, if He had not refused.

For one day, when I was in a tight corner, Jesus might have come and whispered to me, "Lad, be brave. Bear it like a man, though it tear your soul to tatters! Bear it, lad."

Then I would have turned to Jesus and cried, "Who are you to speak to me? I remember that time in the desert when you were in a tight corner. What did you do? You used God's special endowment for your own ends. That unique gift denied to us! You used it just to save yourself from consequences that millions of men have had to endure. O! I know you were hungry: but we are often hungry. It is easy for you to speak, Jesus. *You*

got yourself out of your tight corner by a little private miracle."

And that would have finished Jesus for me!

"The stones, Jesus, the stones!"

Then thinking of me and my poor human limitations, He turned on His own temptation and cried, "Get thee behind me, Satan."

And, at the end, He left that desert, staggering like a drunken man, weak with appalling hunger, until He reached the nearest farm-cottage, and leaning feebly on the lintel, begged, as I would do, for a cup of water and a crust of bread!

For there in that desert, He put Himself solely and simply on my level that He might endure what I must endure. For my sake, He refused to aid Himself by any powers denied to me. And this He did, "emptying Himself," in order that, being like me, He might become my Saviour.

That is why He *is* my Saviour!

Such a Master!

II

The second scene represents the possible misuse of His powers for the good of others. Again I stress "for the good of others." That is the heart of the temptation.

He is sitting there on a spur of rock with His chin resting on His hands, looking out wistfully on

the scattered world of men and women whom He so passionately wishes to save and serve.

How can He do it?

How can He attract these careless, self-centred, worldly, idly-busy people down in the cities and villages of Galilee and Judea? If only He could arrest and grip them! If only He could interest them straight-a-way! If only He could fascinate them, even in spite of themselves! Would it not be worth while to do something that might arrest and startle, win their interest, so that from that He might go on to deeper things?

Mark you—to deeper things!

I wonder if anyone can appreciate this dilemma of our Lord just so much as a modern preacher. In my own little measure, with every other minister, I have felt the appeal of this debate. I have questioned at times if it might not be a good and gracious policy, for God and my people, to do some outré and startling thing that would at least break the placid calm of solemn indifference, as a stone plops into a stagnant pool. Might I not be serving God and awakening thought, just by scandalising you? *Could I not dazzle some of you into the arms of God?*

What would be wrong with that if only I did it for God and you?

This is what tempted Jesus.

He loved these people so deeply that He felt He could do anything to win them. But if He came preaching a simple message from God, would they listen to Him? Had they ever listened to any of God's messengers on these terms?

But suppose for a moment,—suppose He clambered up to the top of that pinnacle of the Temple, that one in the misty distance, when all the priests and people were gathered together for some big occasion. Some big occasion surely—perhaps the Passover! The people would be massed in their thousands: and it was the multitude He wished to impress. He might call aloud from the top. That would attract general and immediate attention. Every neck would be craned to look at Him. Jerusalem literally would stand agape!

"What fool is that up on the pinnacle? . . . Look at him! He is like a spider crawling along a sunbeam! . . . I cannot bear the sight: it makes me dizzy. . . . It is sheer madness! He will fall and be smashed to powder. . . . Heavens! He is going to jump! . . . He has jumped."

What a commotion!

Then, when He landed lightly on His feet like a feather, and bowed smiling like a master juggler . . . ! ! ! No need to blow a bugle!

"Who is He? Who is He?"

"I am Jesus, the messenger of God."

Think of it. Just to say that to a petrified audience. "I am Jesus, the messenger of God."

A programme like that—for God's dear sake and ours—would certainly stir a gigantic curiosity. Not only would He have an unparalleled start for His ministry, but He would also convince the people of His own unique nature. The nation would hail Him at once as the promised Lord. This would ensure Him an eager, startled, awakened crowd who would hang on His lips with gaping awe. From that, what might He not do?

If used by Jesus for higher ends, this might be a good and honourable use of power. To win these careless and indifferent people for the interests of God might in itself justify any means. Could power be better consecrated than in the blessed service of God? Remember, *the blessed service of God!*

Further, for His own comfort, He might prove thereby the truth of God's promises to His own soul. Here, in this lonely spot, away from judging eyes, this might be the best place to put God to a quiet and reassuring test!

"Try the pinnacle, Jesus!"

"All means are good that lead to God. You will arrest these Jews with a superb start, and you will bring in God's Kingdom with a divine rush. You will convince them that you are the Messiah, with all the credentials of God's power. What is wrong with it, Jesus? Remember, it is all for God's blessed service. So try the pinnacle! God will bear thee up."

"Get thee behind me, Satan."

"I cannot become an ignoble conjuror even for God. I seek to win the world to goodness for the love of goodness, and to God for the love of God. I come to preach a message of truth: and that must be accepted for its own pure sake. There is no other way of accepting it."

There are legitimate ways of arresting attention and winning interest. There are also ways, apparently successful, that only end in their own defeat. We may win people to think about God by certain devices—by clap-trap, by exploiting emotion, by sensationalism—but in the end these methods only lead people to despise both God and us.

Every fair man will notice that throughout His life and ministry Jesus never worked any deed of wonder that would constrain people or win a kind of paralysed consent. Every good deed He wrought was from love or crying human need. He preached the full message of God, God's love and God's passion: but He left that message to do its own beautiful work. Our Lord will never go out of His way to work a miracle to convince us. Even if He did, it would not convince us. Perhaps that is the perfect answer. We can only be convinced of the truth *by being convinced of the truth!* There is no other possible way.

A young man said to me not long ago, "I am in such agony of doubt. If God would only give me

a sign from heaven to convince my soul." . . . *My dear Sir, your soul can only be convinced by being convinced!* If a thing is not true, a thousand miracles will not make it true. Jesus came into Galilee like a simple unheralded messenger, and He preached God and God's love. If men and women do not take that on its sheer worth and truth, nothing in this earth will ever help them. The only legitimate argument for truth is that it is true.

There will be no startling sign given unto this generation except "the sign of the prophet Jonah"! And what was that? Simply an unknown tattered and unheralded man, a despised alien, without credentials and with no fictitious authority, preaching passionately the sin of man and the mercy of God. Nothing more. If truth does not convince you, what will?

None the less, to win this people at once for God's message was a real temptation for the eager soul of Jesus. He would have gasping crowds, convinced that He was the Messiah. Would it matter much, even if they were "convinced" by a trick?

Jesus played fair with human reason.

So He left the desert trusting only in two things,—truth and God. He resolved that His message must stand or fall by its own worth.

Walking into the first little village, He stood at

a corner of the market-place, and cried passionately, "Repent, for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand." That is how He began His ministry. That is how He ended it. Even at the last, in Pilate's palace, He refused "the legions of angels."

This is our Saviour, who offers God for His eternal worth alone. *Repent, and believe the Gospel.*

III

The third scene embodies a possible misuse of His powers for the good of God. Again, I stress the word "good."

However much Jesus loved me, He loved God more. Indeed, He loved me because He loved God. It was the world for God that He wanted, this supremely. It was His dream and passion. How could He do it? If only He could win this world for God.

Could the attainment of such a magnificent and holy end justify any means? Would it matter what means were used, so long as the end itself was attained? At any cost the world for God! But could it be *at any cost?* Honour, perhaps? Or His own dreams?

If therefore He used His power to come to terms with the world—to strike a bargain or fix a compromise—would that be wrong? Suppose He did not pitch His terms so high? Evil was already entrenched in the world: it had literally "dug itself

in." It possessed immense resources and vested interests. To fight it on a clear issue of life or death would mean a bitter business. Even if there must be war, are there not two ways of settling war—one, by fighting to the last ditch, the other, by treaty, an honourable arrangement?

It is *the feasibility of a treaty* that is the heart of this dilemma. Could Jesus deal in compromises?

It might be better, even for God's ends, to rule a decently reformed world, seriously reformed, than to insist on perfection and rule only a corner. If He graciously admitted the present state of things —say, that it is only human to err—if He demanded a more lenient programme, might He not gain in large ways for God's purposes? The unlimited exactions of perfection, a gospel of thoroughness, might only lead to needless and prolonged antagonisms. But if He pruned His demands to the needs of the age and the imperfections of man, He might so carry the world with Him that it might soon be almost, if not quite, God's.

"If you will own me, and acknowledge my power,—if you will fall down and worship me, even for a moment,—I shall give you what your soul desires, the empire of the world. This is an easy way, and a speedy way, to win the world! If you do not come to terms with me, your way will be hard. Very hard. Look here, towards Jerusa-

lem. Do you observe that little hill, with a gaunt cross standing on it? That is the only throne you will ascend, if you do not accept my terms and align yourself with the world's ideas. All I ask is a trifling recognition, a mere acknowledgment: and all these kingdoms of the world will I give you."

An alluring prospect!

This would satisfy God, surely? This would satisfy Christ's own personal ambition, surely? This would avoid that ghastly cross, the agony, and the apparent defeat. Not to run the flag just so high: *and all for God's dear sake!*

Jesus said, "Get thee behind me, Satan."

Why did He say it?

Simply because, like God, He would have all or nothing. Evil is the one thing with which God cannot compromise. Jesus must use God's powers on God's terms, and do God's work with God's tools. All or nothing! There is no other way for the Son of God.

So He left the desert, cleansed of His own temptations. How bitter and seductive they were, we can but imperfectly guess. Our joy for ever lies in His victory. He went forth, in God's strength, to walk the narrow path He had mapped out for Himself in His great debate.

From that moment, in a natural self-enlightenment, He must have known where that path led. A

soul that saw so deeply into the mind of God could not help seeing as deeply into the mind of man. And there in the misty depths of human hatred, He could not but foresee the possibility of defeat.

Defeat meant death. Death meant a cross.

I understand now where He beat out that royal sentence: "*What shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world and lose his own soul?*"

"Strong Son of God."

IV

THE DILEMMA OF POPULARITY

THE LURE OF A VACANT THRONE

NO fair man may deny that Jesus walked warily and in strict fulfilment of the rigourous programme He had beaten out for Himself in the agony of the desert. There He had definitely faced the issues as they affected His mission and His ministry. He had chosen His path, planned His campaign, defined His aims, and settled His loyalties.

He began His ministry then in the clear spirit and with the definite aims foreshadowed in that Temptation scene. That is beyond all question.

In spite of this, before He had gone far, He was forced to face a startling dilemma which arose and confronted Him from out of the facts and results of His own early work. This dilemma was so embarrassing and presented such incalculable possibilities, that it is only fair to Jesus to show that it was not of His seeking but was forced on Him by the folly and bias of others. He did not diverge one hair-breadth from His own ideal and methods as settled in the desert: and yet He was called upon to consider a problem

that shook the whole dream of His ministry afresh to its foundations.

I

I find that most of the dilemmas of my own life are the result, conscious or unconscious, of my own acts. I can truly say that "if I had not done this" or "if I had not said that," I should not have been forced to face this or that unnerving problem. If, then, we are to acquit Jesus of being a party to His own dilemma, we must in honesty state certain things as clearly as possible.

Let us observe that from the outset our Lord proclaimed only a spiritual message of high demand. He dwelt entirely on the spiritual issues of God's claim. There could be no possible mistake about this in the mind of an unprejudiced hearer. Nothing either in His message or manner could appeal to lower views. He preached God, God alone,—God's call, God's love, God's forgiveness, God's Fatherhood. In all fairness it has to be said that if anyone mistook that message then he was guilty of the common human mistake of reading his own bias into Christ's words. Our Lord's position in this matter was as clear as sunlight.

Further, His gospel of the Kingdom was plainly stated and unmistakably spiritual. He dwelt, for instance, on the *nature* of the Kingdom. It is

within you, He said, and it comes with no outward appearance or pretension. . . . As faithfully, He announced its *terms* and its *objects*. Its terms —repentance, faith, and a God-like heart. Its objects—the salvation of the human soul and the salvation of the world of human souls. . . . And even more pointedly, He unfolded its *demands* —the good life lived in God, love and charity to others, and a life of gracious sacrifice. Is it possible that any unbiassed hearer could make a mistake about this definite programme?

Once more, lest any unthinking person might be misled, He deliberately limited Himself in the working of His wonders. There is no record or suggestion of any great deed wrought by Him for display, for personal pleasure, for publicity, or for its own sake. If we examine His works of grace, we shall find that He never exercised His power except at the call of urgent need or from the passion of His own love. For, as I tried to show you, the temptation to juggle with His mysterious powers or to dazzle the multitude by display had been faced and settled in that lonely struggle in the desert. From that He never swerved.

Still more, a supreme point to notice, Jesus always sought to keep a firm control of public enthusiasm. Whenever it grew too ardent or threatened to become unreasoning, He quietly withdrew

Himself to other towns, as if to allow the simmering passion to cool. Again and again, in this same connection, He cautioned grateful people whom He had helped not to publish or blazon His reputation abroad. It is remarkable how often the records tell us that He warned this one or that one to "tell no man." It is quite plain what this means. These injunctions of silence are part of a reasoned policy,—His desire to win acceptance for the truth of His message alone, not for the startling deeds which might so easily inflame the unbalanced popular imagination.

All this is true and needs to be said, in view of what took place.

II

In spite of this quiet programme, the result of His early ministry was astounding. He leapt at once into an amazing popularity,—the kind of boundless acclamation that has so often turned the heads of great men and twisted them into looking down wrong lanes.

As the records plainly show, Jesus had the whole body of the people at His heels like a flock of sheep. Even His enemies,—dubious of Him but fascinated, their hostility still half-dormant,—could not tear themselves from His influence. He was the idol of the countryside: and every village for miles around sent its quota each day to swell the multitude. The crowds about Him were insuffer-

able in their pressure, for they beleaguered Him day and night. Their unending demands broke all endurance,—even Christ's. Often He had to steal away to a mountain-top or a desert place, not only for private prayer, but for sheer rest.

But perhaps with Him these two were one. Prayer was Rest!

Have you ever considered how little private life Jesus had at this time?

We know what private life means to us. Any one who lives in the public eye realises that some private life may mean the salvation of his soul—a stolen moment in the day—a corner of the home which he can call his own and where he may relax and become his natural self. This privilege often saves our sanity! I am told that even the leather-belts and chains of machinery need to be frequently relaxed if their efficiency is to be preserved. We are delicate machinery!

Jesus had no private life.

Even when the prying eyes of the crowd were off Him, there were the speculating eyes of these twelve big men boring Him through. He was hedged round with eyes, a ring of eyes. Eyes everywhere,—kindly or critical, adoring or questioning, reverent or cynical. Eyes that cursed or eyes that caressed, eyes that were either an envy or a benediction. But eyes! Always eyes! We read so often that they "watched" Him.

None the less, the amazing thing to me is how simple, how unconsciously unaffected, how serenely natural He remained through it all. There is not the suggestion of a strut, a pose, or an affectation about the simple unspoiled Jesus. Anyone who lives much in the public gaze knows how easy it is —often how necessary it is—to acquire subtle affectations, a social or a business manner, or a protecting pose. A prince's smile: a politician's vagueness: a doctor's manner: a business man's hustle: a parson's gravity:—so much of it all, not really insincere, is only a subtle defence against the unending demands of constant publicity! I have never met a public man whom I could not convict of a suspicion of Strut. I do not condemn him in the least: it often saves his sanity!

But there it is!

The amazing thing in Jesus is the unvarying simplicity, naturalness and honesty of His whole life, without pose or posture or affectation. He was always Jesus, never the official prophet.

That in itself is something that needs to be accounted for.

III

Unfortunately, this popularity was not only blind and ignorant, but based on false hopes, founded on crude popular misconceptions and baseless dreams. The people were gasping for a worldly Kingdom, a free Jewish empire, a nation

that could lift the heel of Rome from its throat, a lordly people that might dominate the world in earthly grandeur and revive the lost glories of the past.

Now comes a real touch of irony.

In spite of His plain unvarnished message, as I have sketched it to you, these people imagined that they saw in Jesus the type of leader they wanted. Could self-deception go farther? This big man of power would lead them! Here was the Messiah, the very Messiah they desired!

This is one of the great ironical situations in history.

Not once but always Jesus said, "The Kingdom of Heaven cometh not with observation."

"The Kingdom of Heaven is within you."

Yet they came by force to make Him a King.

IV

It is historically true that if Jesus had made even a trifling departure from His own perfect programme, He might have set the heather on fire. It is surely worth a thought—what a changed world it would have been, if He had faltered here! The simmering political and social discontent only needed a spark. To my mind, that spark was an ambitious man, a leader with some power behind him, one who could invoke and hold human loyalties.

None could have done that better than Jesus.

Could our Lord so rearrange His own ideas and so reconstruct His own programme that He might make use of this great leverage for the ends of His Kingdom?

It was a chance such as had never entered into any other life. The unrest did not need to be created. It was there. The passion was there. The people were there. Most of all, the opportunity was there. And if you think of it, it is opportunity that generally suggests a way for us to damn ourselves. More men are led astray by a plausible opportunity than by their own native passions. Opportunity is the mid-wife to desire.

> *"How oft the sight of means to do ill deeds*
> *Makes ill deeds done."*

V

They came by force to make Him a King.

Hot with their age-long wrongs, carried away by their own dreams and desires, seeing in Jesus an evident source of majestic power, they came to force His hand.

They would lead Him to a vacant throne.

Our question is, whether Jesus, when approached by this mob of a committee, could consider their offer and become an opportunist? He could justly urge that He had not sought this dénouement. Indeed He could assert beyond all question that He had avoided it. He had used no

unjust means to buy such outrageous popularity. But now that it had come,—unsought and even unwanted,—might He not use this unique chance, purified of course, for the ends of God?

This, I think, was a real dilemma.

VI

How great the dilemma was, we may see if for a wild moment we imagine that Jesus accepted the challenge. Suppose He said, "I shall use this superb chance that is thrust upon me for the glory of God."

Had He said so, I believe that there is a good line of argument in which He could have fully justified Himself to us and the world. Remember that we judge Him now by His own best standards. If He had never given us these standards,—as in this present refusal—how would we judge His acceptance?

1. To begin with, the chance was wholly unsought. It came to Him as a kind of "act of God." Many of us indeed might have read "providence" in such a circumstance.

2. Further, He might have argued justly that He and He alone could direct this movement in gracious ways and to magnificent ends. We have no idea what a popular movement might accomplish, with a leader like Jesus at its head. Think of it calmly for a moment. A great social and political regeneration, promoted and inspired by a

pure force like Jesus,—why! the idea is an intoxication! It would revolutionise all systems and cleanse all governments. What a world it might have been!

3. Moreover, although the movement was selfish and aggressive so far as the Jews were concerned, He could have introduced into the crusade His own redeeming passion. He could have given it a world-wide turn and a God-like turn. He could have made His own conditions and introduced His own ideals. And whatever happened, being what He was, He would certainly have brought an immense social betterment to the oppressed peoples of the world. He could have changed history more deeply and for infinitely better ends than Alexander or Napoleon.

4. In any case, although it meant warfare, is it not sometimes a good thing to use power to crush omnipotent evil and to correct the flagrant injustices of a rotten world? The arm of force, used justly, brings its own remedy with speed and does not ask a needy world to wait for the slow evolving ways of argument and persuasion. While we reason and wrestle for "spiritual conviction," millions are dying in ruin. Gracious force might do in a year what persuasion could not accomplish in centuries.

5. Again, although such a use of force might not be the highest employment of His power, yet in a world like this we have to take things as they are

and men as they are. We have to strive not for impossible ideals but for what is humanly practicable. If men will not accept the best, may we not use the second-best?

6. Further, there might be bloodshed. But is it not a squeamish and overwrought conscience that considers bloodshed always wrong? In the long run, there might be less bloodshed in correcting one immense wrong, now and for ever, than in allowing a thousand smaller wrongs to remain, injustices that daily exact their own cruel levy. The little driblets, when put in the bucket, might be worse than one big welter,—say, "one war to end war"!

7. In any case, judged from any angle, would this opportunity not bring a golden day nearer,—a great age of political justice, righteous rule, and the supreme honour of God?

8. And finally, even if Jesus were to accede to this appeal of ambition, is there anything wrong with a personal ambition that has the best ends of others locked in its heart? Ambition, nobly used, has been one of God's most blessed gifts to a struggling world.

These are not arguments which I have invented. I have heard them used every day by good men, and greeted with cheers in our commercial and political life. Why might Jesus not use them, too, in a far purer cause than anybody ever planned?

VII

If He had accepted, what then?

I can give the best answer by guessing why He refused.

1. He came to offer men one thing and one thing only,—God. But God is a personal offer to a man's soul, and must be personally and intelligently accepted. We can never force a man to accept God against his reason. We might as well compel an astronomer to believe that the sun moves round the earth. We may compel him to say it, as they once compelled Galileo: but we cannot compel him to believe it.

In the same way, a man can only believe in God as his soul compels him, not as anybody else compels him. That is why all religious persecutions and all so-called "holy wars" are sheer futilities. We may command assent: but we cannot command belief.

Now, Jesus came to offer the world God! He therefore refused to use His power to subdue the world, because, even if He had subdued it, He could never subdue it to God. The good life in God is something that must be deliberately chosen. Christianity does not deal in conscripts but in volunteers.

2. My second reason is a corollary from this. We cannot "save the world" or "save the masses" as our saying goes. It is a foolish phrase. We can only save the individuals who are in the world.

Salvation is a personal matter. We are saved when we turn to God in our great need and choose Him as Lord and Saviour.

In early days, a missioner might go to the court of a Frankish King. If he converted the King, that lord might then order his whole tribe to be converted with him. They were baptised in solid droves and blocks. Another nation for Christ! Converted!

But of course they were not converted. For conversion is always and only a matter of personal conviction: it is a soul turning to God as a flower turns to the light, and deliberately choosing God. One cannot be converted in any other way.

Hence, since Jesus came only to preach and proclaim God, and since God can only be accepted as we give our hearts to Him, force was the last weapon He could use. (I think it is also the last weapon His Church can use.) For His high ends, it would matter next to nothing though He conquered and subdued the whole world, so long as He did not win their love. To gain even one man's love was a greater victory than to have a conquered world prostrate at His feet.

3. Further, this suggested plan of a great national movement represented the second best. But after the Temptation, Jesus never dealt in second bests! He sought a man's heart, not his person: his love, not his mere obedience. A slave may

obey: but Jesus does not deal in slaves. His trade is in the free affections of a heart that gives itself gladly, not because it is driven, but because it is won. That is the best,—God's best and Christ's best. If He cannot get this, He will have nothing else. He may stand at the door and knock. We know He does. But He will never push that door open or steal in unwanted by an unsnibbed window.

4. Christ never put social and political programmes first. He never even put temporal welfare first. Let the modern world listen!

I do not say that He despised these things, or did not give them their due importance and place. No one cared more for people and their temporal welfare than our Lord. He fed hunger: He healed disease: He corrected wrongs: He declared justice: He cured insanity: He preached a clean, pure life. None ever did these things more passionately, because if the truth be told none ever loved so dearly. It might be well if the modern church cared for these things as much as Jesus.

But Christ's was a love big enough to wish the best, not the second best. He knew that the supreme thing a man needs is a saved soul, a heart right with God and touched by His love. As an immediate social consequence, we know that when the heart is right with God, truly right, it will be right with man. It is a vision of God that gives us the finest vision of man. I question indeed if

our heart will ever be right with man until it is right with God.

So you will not find any social or political programmes in Jesus. You may find much in His teaching and life that may help and inspire your programme. *But it will be your programme, not His!* I am tired of those who read the New Testament as if it were a modern social tract or a treatise on Economics. The people who speak of Jesus as if He came merely to affect our social welfare, or give happiness, or a "good time" do not know the first thing about His message.

He gave the inspiration for all good programmes, for He gave the love for God, man, truth, justice, peace, and equality,—the basis of all good programmes. But programmes die: it is a habit they have. The inspiration remains. And that is why, when all our modern platforms are demolished, Jesus will be eternally used as the buttress of every good scheme. He alone gives the love, the truth, and the passion that make men dream of Utopias and work for a coming Kingdom.

He gives God, the secret of all progress.

VIII

"Come and be our King, Master: and bring in a glad new empire that will sweep evil by force into life's dust-bin."

But Jesus slipped away from the acclaiming crowds. He climbed up that hill behind the multi-

tude: He fell on His knees: He prayed passionately all night long to God. . . . When the dawn came, it rose also in His own soul.

Then in the morning, when the people knew by His face that He had refused, the fickle crowds fell away from Him as leaves drop from the frosted trees in November. He was a crank, not a Messiah.

Jesus was left once more with His little company. "Will ye also go away?" He asked. I can imagine the wistfulness of His note as He looked at the dwindled band. Had they, too, joined Him from false motives?

Peter cried,—(God bless you, Peter, though I know that even you must have been heart-broken when Jesus pushed that glittering crown aside)—Peter cried, "Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of Eternal life."

I believe that Jesus smiled.

So He settled His great dilemma. He refused the vacant throne.

Unless you count the cross a throne?

V

THE DILEMMA OF POLITICS

IF we have done anything so far, we have at least seen that our Lord's life was as full of problems and unnerving decisions as any human life could be. His vocation did not ensure Him any ignoble freedom from temptation, but only a noble courage against its attacks. Even to see a fact like this may be an immense spiritual gain for us.

For one thing, it will help to destroy that inane picture of a calm passionless Christ who marched along our tortured ways with unclouded serenity, and who therefore had little touch with us and no appeal for our tempted souls.

I consider that our chief gain in this study of His problems will lie in our rediscovering His ancient agonies and finding how He had to wrestle through, by perfect communion with the Father, to His own hard-won victory. If we see this, I think He will stand by us as a real Saviour, made like us, who by His victory can transform us until we are made like Him. For it is only as He is one with us in our temptations, that He can ever make us one with Him in His victory.

One may freely admit that an ideal and a passion such as possessed Him may have rescued Him from many of the petty deviations and allurements that curse our peace. This is true. When our eyes are fixed on a star we are not so ready to see the mud that lies at our feet. Hence we may well admit that Jesus may have been saved from many of our commonest fleshly snares. But if this is so, is it not also true that like Him we too may possess a protecting dream, and may thereby be saved from a mind too easily distracted and allured?

On the other hand, the possession of such an ideal as Christ had may bring its own peculiar and typical temptations. Not the least of these is the constant discord between the ideal and reality, the hard brutal facts of ordinary living. We find among ourselves that the higher we pitch our ideal, the deeper is our constant puzzle. The man who takes life easily goes through it easily. But the very purity of our ideal brings its own spiritual danger: for when measured against life, it may induce petulance, impatience, contempt and pride. We have seen it even in the best souls. Thus I imagine that none of us can be tempted as fiercely as Jesus, simply because none of us has the peerless dream He had in His heart.

We pay for our ideals in subtle ways.

So far the dilemmas Christ had to settle were personal, springing from the debate in His own soul.

He had, for instance, to settle the *spirit* in which He would do His unique work. He had also to define the *aims* of His work. Finally, He had to formulate the *methods* by which He would carry it out in practice. These dilemmas arose out of the native purity of His own heart, and out of the special quality of His work.

In this and the succeeding chapters I turn to two problems which were thrust upon Him by others. They are dilemmas of judgment rather than of conduct. Perhaps, indeed, some might be inclined to call them "conundrums" rather than dilemmas. But this at least may be said of them, that each of them presented Jesus with a distinct choice. His answer, one way or the other, meant much for His ministry and for us.

I

By this time, the hostility of the Pharisees had become compact and even desperate. They had reached that point in their aversion when they were ready to attempt anything that could either trip or convict Jesus.

In their personal bias, they imagined that He was not only their individual enemy, but also the enemy of their system. To quote the words of John the Baptist, they came to see that the axe was not only threatening the branches, but was laid at the root of the tree. Hence they began to surround Him on every conceivable occasion and tempt Him in every

suggestible way to see if they might unearth some plausible excuse for a charge that might silence Him for good.

By painful experience, however, they had discovered that Jesus was a doughty opponent. On occasion, He had actually turned their own guns against themselves. They had now grown cunningly cautious. "Once bitten is twice shy."

It must have been an annoyance beyond bearing to these domineering ecclesiastics that this "unlettered" man should have held them so easily at arm's length. They had regarded Him at first with a kind of tolerant wonder, which had changed into an intolerant contempt, and finally had hardened into an intolerable anger.

There is nothing just so dangerous as narrow goodness. Sometimes it is more dangerous than open sin. For this narrow goodness generally persuades itself that its own form of goodness is the only possible.

We must never forget that the Pharisees were good men, ready to suffer for their own ideas of God. Our modern picture of them, our very use of the word "Pharisee," is a foolish and ignorant libel. These men saved the religious life of their own day, and saved it nobly.

But they were bigots for their own forms and their own narrow ideas of truth. There is no enemy of growing truth so bitter as a bigot. The

Pharisees made up their minds that Christ's type of religion was really worse than sin. Sin at least was an open enemy; but Jesus was subtly undermining the whole edifice of God. They resolved that this man must be wrecked, by fair means or foul.

It is certainly worth observing that Jesus was crucified not by men who were wicked, as we commonly understand the term, but by men who were "good."

II

After many galling repulses, they now feel that they must plot out some deep move. Simple but deep! The more guileless, the better.

First of all, in their twisted hate of Jesus, they did a curious thing. They enlisted the aid of the Herodians. Strange bed-fellows, surely! To see the Pharisees and the Herodians—ancient enemies—whispering together in eager alliance almost makes one smile. So might one laugh to see an old "Die-hard" and a Hyde Park Orator plotting out a common political agreement!

Look at them for a moment. Such a queer alliance deserves a passing glance.

On the one hand, *the Pharisees*. . . . The strictest of the strict, the Puritans of their day, rigid and stiff-backed nationalists, who would acknowledge no rule and no King but the Lord Jehovah, the preachers of a spiritual democracy!

On the other hand, *the Herodians.* . . . The political party who adhered to the dynasty of Herod, the apostate Jews who strutted like peacocks about the court of Kings, the Royalist cavaliers of their age, the kind of men who might flatter even the Herods about the divine right of Kings!

To see them together, plotting against Jesus, is a spectacle. It is more than that. It is a unique instance of lesser hates driven out by a greater, a proof that all the varied forms of evil can club together to defeat goodness. Pharisees and Herodians, with their heads glued together in that corner, to "down" Jesus, their common foe!

I do not know who suggested it—though it has a typically Herodian touch—but between them, they devised a clever move.

First of all, as an accomplished courtier might do, one who believes in the oily art of flattery, they concocted a choice tribute to Jesus. Indeed, I question if there is any finer tribute to our Lord than this preamble they composed. It is doubly valuable to us today, for it is that rare thing, the testimony of enemies.

I do not say that they believed their own words: but in a true sense, their words were what they believed in spite of themselves. Since they were insincere, they lied when they spoke the truth: but since they were really expressing the impression

Jesus made on their hearts, they spoke the truth when they lied.

Their next move was even more clever.

They guessed that if either of them, Pharisees or Herodians, approached Jesus openly, He would be on His guard at once. Their plan was to take Him unawares. There must be nothing obvious or challenging.

So they gathered together some young men,—students, fresh open-faced young lads, disciples of one of the schools. From their point of view, this was distinctly clever. (Though from our point of view today, this in itself was a singular testimony to Jesus.) They knew and counted on Christ's interest in any young artless enquirer. They believed—is it not an unconscious tribute to Jesus?—that He would welcome such genuine seekers, worried with problems. How His big heart would open to any groping puzzled soul! And here were some young men, enquiring students, wrestling with life's problems, knocking at His door!

A clever touch indeed!

Clever, if they had not been dealing with Jesus!

III

The first scene in the play I might call *the Comedy in the Green Room.*

Having carefully chosen their young students, they gathered them together in a quiet place and

put them through their paces. The young men, guileness so far as enmity was concerned, were like a group of actors preparing and conning their lines before stepping on the stage. They were told exactly what they should say. They were asked to repeat it again and again until they were word-perfect. They were even instructed how to deport themselves, and how to put a little more guileless interest into their eyes!

It is amusing for us today to get this peep behind the scenes. It suggests to me the Green Room, where the actor mutters over his lines, while here and there he gives his borrowed plumes a pull and a pat, and dabs a little more rouge and powder on his face.

All this before he faces the limelight. In this case, the *search-light* of Christ's calm eyes!

Out you go then, young lads, and act your play. You are now word-perfect and you know how to hold yourselves, as guileless enquirers. Jesus will see that you are only young men keen on problems, seeking light amid youth's puzzles and worries.

We of course shall keep discreetly in the shadow! Surely these artlessly artful college men will throw dust in this Galilean's eyes. After all, He is only a rough untutored prophet from the country!

IV

They are now on the stage.

Word-perfect and suitably rouged—no longer simple, however, for they have become confederates and plotters, even if it be only a young man's crude idea of a joke—word-perfect and accoutred, they come before Jesus.

I can imagine the shadowed eyes with which He looked at them as they went through their pitiful part. He was not hearing their words so much as hearing their thoughts. I have no doubt they performed their duty well and flattered themselves that they had deceived this simple Galilean. And when they had finished, they waited.

For what?

We read in one simple sentence,—a striking instance of the Bible's glorious economy in words—"*Jesus perceived their wickedness.*"

It is a modern as well as an ancient game to try to throw dust in Christ's eyes.

Let us watch them, as they play their part.

Before they stated their dilemma, they led up to it by mouthing that fine tribute which the grey-haired and hard-eyed plotters had put into their hearts.

Notice this tribute for a moment.

As they spoke it, in laboured insincerity, it is only honied speech, oily words, vulgar flattery. Yet I do not know a finer unconscious tribute to this Jesus of ours. It may be that enemies often see more clearly than friends.

"*We know that thou art true*"—sincere, with no double meanings or divided loyalties, one who rings true like a bell. This is a tribute to character.

"*And that thou teachest the way of God in truth,*"—honestly and fearlessly, with open face and clean heart. This is a tribute to His message. "The way of God," mark you. That is something they never confessed before.

"*Neither carest thou for any man, for thou regardest not the person of man,*"—neither courting human favour nor dressing your message to suit your audience. This is a tribute to His methods, which contrasted so strongly with the leaders of His day.

Well done, young men! Well done, you old grey-haired plotters! We take this gladly as the testimony of the enemy.

They lied when they spoke the truth. They spoke the truth when they lied.

V

Then came the dilemma.

In their case, I have called it a conundrum: for though it was a real and bitter dilemma to many earnest Jewish hearts, it was only a conundrum to them. They were waiting for Christ's reply, not to receive and welcome light, but to scribble His answer down on one of their student note-books and report it by their seniors to Pilate.

This is the dilemma.

Is it lawful for us as good Jews, as God's people, owing allegiance to Him alone, is it lawful for us to give tribute to Caesar, or not?

The question is as clever as the methods in which it was prepared. It hoisted Jesus on to the horns of a dilemma.

If, to give a true solution, one must answer every question by "Yes" or "No," then Jesus was in a cleft stick. He could not avoid the issue by an *evasion,* and no answer at all would have been worse than either "yes" or "no." If He had refused to answer, it would have been a proof of fear, and His silence would have condemned Him as a prophet and teacher with His audience. Silence or evasion would have been fatal.

But if He answered "yes" or "no," He was equally lost.

If He said "We are a conquered people and are rightly due to give tribute to Caesar," He would have outraged all the holy passionate nationalistic dreams of the nation. Not a decent Jew would have listened to Him for another moment. Even among His own disciples there were keen Zealots, who hated Rome worse than the Southern Irish hated Cromwell, and with as much reason.

If He said, "We Jews may be forced at the point of the bayonet to pay tribute to Caesar, but we deny that it is lawful," there would have been a troop of soldiers at His humble lodging within

an hour, and Pilate would have made short work of this political upstart. Rome might tolerate any diversity of religious opinion: but she was hard as steel in political questions.

Tell us, therefore, us young men, "Is it lawful to give tribute to Caesar or not?"

Jesus looked at them.

Have you ever wondered what the eyes of Jesus were like? We find a Greek word used in this connection in the New Testament which suggests that Jesus "looked into" or "looked through" people. Whatever that implies, it implies at least that there was a quality of sheer intensity in His gaze, a steady penetrating look, such a look, for instance, as that which broke through Peter's bluster until it touched the healing fount of tears.

Christ looked through these young men and saw the intention of their soul. "Why tempt ye me, ye hypocrites?" What a thrust for His complacent questioners who had fondly hoped to throw dust in His eyes!

In reply, Jesus gave what I might reverently describe as the cleverest and the most perfect answer that I know of in all literature. "Shew me the tribute money." And they brought Him a penny. "Whose is this image and superscription?" They say unto Him, "Caesar's." Jesus said, "Render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and unto God the things that are God's."

I told this story once to an American who did not know much about his New Testament. When I had finished, he turned to me and said, "Well, now, can you beat it?"

That is my own opinion. "Can you beat it?"

VI

What did Jesus do in this answer?

Incidentally, I may say that He has taught me the utter folly of trying to treat Him as if He were a fool.

We are all guilty of this, even in our holy things, perhaps most of all in our holy things. We bring our little insincerities, our social disguises, our painted faces, and our parrot words into His presence. We think that we deceive Him as we deceive others, and often ourselves. But whatever Christ is, He is clear-eyed. He simply looks at us with the eyes of God. Perhaps these eyes pity, but at least they *see!*

We are a people who love masks, and we all wear them. There is not a face before me now that is not subtly masked. We deceive men, for "there is no art to read the mind's construction in the face." In time we may even deceive ourselves.

God is not mocked!

Further, Jesus defined His own attitude unmistakably to a great modern question, from two angles,—negatively and positively.

1. Negatively, this is a plain announcement that He refused to be drawn into the vortex of political debate, or to side with any party.

Why did He do this?

Some people think that He should have given wise political guidance to His own needy age. If He had any light to give, why should He withhold it? Men surely need gracious leadership in the material things of life, as well as in the spiritual.

He refused to do this for one or two serious reasons.

(*a*) However important and urgent they may seem to us, political questions are purely temporary. They pass in a few years into the limbo of mere dialectics, and are soon only of such historical interest as a mummy is. This question of tribute to Caesar, for instance, is dead. The claim of the American States to secede,—a great matter in its own day—is dead. Roman Catholic emancipation —how bitter that question was—is dead. Woman's suffrage—we remember its turmoil—is dead. In fact, all the questions we call great, great often because we are so near to them, die in their own age and certainly die with their settlement. They are as temporary as our own darkened passions.

But Christ's message is timeless, not for one day but for all days. If He had pronounced on any big question that agitated His own day, however timely His word would have been, He would have ceased to be timeless. That part of

His message would have died with the occasion that prompted it.

(*b*) All parties, just because they are parties, cling only to aspects of truth. The whole truth so often lies not in any one of the parties but in all. Just because I am outside of it, I have been immensely puzzled, when in America, to understand the difference, other than historical, between a Democrat and a Republican. These distinctions are real to those who live amid their issues, but unreal to those who are outside them. I dare say, an American citizen might be as puzzled to understand the difference between a "cautious Liberal" and a "progressive Unionist"!

Parties everywhere represent only aspects of truth. But Jesus said, "*I am the Truth.*" He claimed to give something that is bigger than any party, that may be a light and an inspiration to purify all parties. If He had given political guidance, He would have been just as living or as dead as the issues on which He pronounced!

2. On the positive side, His answer suggests that He gave big living principles, not little passing policies, eternal principles of right and justice in which ephemeral policies may be framed.

He was concerned with the saving doctrines of good life and conduct, by which all policies may be measured, and in which all policies may be inspired. He gave regulative views of God, of man, of

worth, of truth, of love, of justice, to which all our political schemes should be brought as to a touchstone.

That is what He did here.

In no sense did He evade the question. He answered it perhaps in the fullest measure in which the burning question of state and religion has ever been answered.

On the one hand, He commanded all men, frankly and fully, to "Render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's." What does that mean? Surely it means nothing less than that we should give our full dues to the powers that be, fulfilling our duties to the State, to society, and to our fellow-citizens. We are members of the State, and we handle "Caesar's money." That implies that we accept the privileges of state citizenship, state rights, state protection, state comfort, state amenities.

Now if we accept great privileges, we should be as ready to accept great responsibilities. It is a mean thing to take all that the state offers, and refuse what the state needs. It is the meanest thing in the world, for instance, to stand amid all the great privileges of a stable and civilised nation, and yet cheat in our income tax!

Render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's. The very sweep and comprehensiveness of this charge cover all duties and all times.

"And to God, the things that are God's."

That is added as if its application regulated the message of the first sentence.

It does.

For our view of the State will ultimately depend on our view of God. If God's true service be put first, our service of the State will never suffer. The best citizens of the Fatherland are those who love the Father's land.

For in God our conscience is sharpened, our sense of duty is deepened, and our regard for others becomes a love. If first of all and most of all we seek to give God what is God's due,—our worship and reverence and obedience,—we shall never grudge what is due to our fellow-men or to the State in which we live.

You will notice that once more Jesus gives no limiting details, but only a great principle to be interpreted by our growing conscience. By lifting all policies into the region of principle, He made His message to His own age as much a message to ours, a message that can never be exhausted until we reach "perfection's sacred heights."

Thus He settled His dilemma.

"Render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and unto God the things that are God's."

As my American friend remarked, "Can you beat it?"

VI

THE DILEMMA OF NATIONAL LAW

JESUS stepped into a full social system, —what we might call a "going concern"—which was exactly as good or as bad as the conscience of the age could devise or tolerate. Each generation, like each nation, has the government it deserves. Men make their own systems, and they must be judged by them.

Jesus had to adjust Himself to this established order as we adjust ourselves to ours. Each day of His life and each act of His day would necessarily bring Him into definite relation with the political and municipal order of things. Like all His fellow-countrymen, He lived under this order, and must have been subtly influenced by it in nameless ways. The whole system, good or bad, must have come under His daily notice and daily criticism, for praise or blame. We have to remember that He was as much a citizen, with a citizen's duties and privileges, as any other individual.

Around Him, there were political institutions of ancient standing: customs of commerce and conduct that were deeply rooted: systems of law and justice that had been slowly built up through the

generations. This recognised social order surrounded Him in all the departments of His life, as the air He breathed. He found it there, acknowledged and enforced, as we find it around us when we step out into work and manhood.

What relation would Jesus assume towards this established social system? How would He adjust Himself to its mingled good and evil? Would He venture on criticism, or if need be, take a public stand against open and flagrant injustice?

We have seen already what attitude He assumed to political programmes. That attitude was summed up in the memorable sentence, "Render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's."

I turn now and ask you to observe the very definite attitude He assumed to the intricate system of *municipal and national law* in His own land and day.

The dilemma was introduced to Him in a singular fashion.

I

He had been speaking to His disciples concerning the duties and dangers lying ahead of them in the difficult days to come. At the close of His talk, He warned them that they might reasonably expect political trouble. Their enemies might use the full power of the State to crush them, and might hale

them before magistrates and powers to stop their mouths in prison or in death. If so, they should carry themselves with a high heart, for God through His Holy Spirit would keep them strong.

That casual word "*magistrate*" struck the ear of one man in the audience, and chimed in with his own preoccupied and unharmonious thoughts. He was that dreadful type of person, a man with a grievance. Most of us have had reason to fear this species of monomaniac, for we know that even the most irrelevant and casual reference will lead him to his pet obsession, as sour jam attracts a stray wasp!

The word "magistrate" set this man off royally on his hobby-horse!

Evidently, there were two brothers of them who had fallen out pitifully about property, a subject that has ruined more homes than warfare itself. The quarrel had evidently gone to extremes. Why is it that between kinsfolk it generally goes to extremes? I have seen brethren more bitterly estranged, on some question of property or money, than if they had been ancient hereditary enemies.

(If you will forgive a digression, I should like to make use of these brackets to insert one! . . . May I assure parents and guardians from my own ministerial experience, that the one thing they should be sure of, for their children's sake, is that their affairs are put in strictly legal order? I have heard fond people remark, "My children are much

too affectionate ever to quarrel in after days about such things as property." If you wish to save them from quarreling, be wise enough now to put the temptation beyond their reach! In later days, other interests and other motives arise, with the new bonds we form; and I have seen families, once loving, rent and ruined by some quarrel about half an acre of ground.)

Forgive my digression:—but it springs from the sad facts of this case.

II

These two brothers had fallen out about an inheritance. From the facts before us, it is very likely that their trusting father—to use a modern phrase—had died "without a will." He had believed, as others do, in his sons' love and mutual honour. But when hard cash and broad acres came into the case, greed crept in to keep them company.

We do not know all the facts: but we know the one big fact,—greed, suspicion, hatred.

Since this man appealed to Jesus, an unofficial person, we may justly infer that he had already tried all available official means without success.

Probably, the case had been disposed of in court: and the decision had gone against him. Or he may have been defeated, as so many in those "good old days" were defeated, by the art of oiling the

judge's palm. (Thank God that such twisted corruption is no longer possible!) Or finally, the issue may have been a debate between law and equity. The law may have pointed one way: and equity, as it sometimes does, may have pointed another.

But at least, since the man came to Jesus, a purely unofficial person but one of startling magnetic influence, we may assume that he had already tried every other available means without success. He was driven to bring his case to this wonderful teacher as a last resource, in the hope that He might use the strange influence He exercised over people, to straighten things out.

III

"Master, speak to my brother that he divide the inheritance with me."

What was he asking Jesus to do?

His question invited our Lord, quite pointedly, not only to use His spiritual influence to settle a question of money, but also to set Himself over against the law of the land, to re-try a case that had been already settled in the approved courts of justice, and so, directly or indirectly, to make some pronouncement on the system of legal justice under which He lived.

All this lies behind the man's suggestion. It is this that makes it essentially impudent.

Some might feel inclined to argue that Jesus

should have heard this man's case, lest there might have been a bitter injustice lurking behind it. Presuming that the man was in trouble, could Jesus do less? That would have been in gracious keeping with His gentle and loving heart.

But Jesus was not only gentle. He was also fair. To be fair, in a thorny case like this, He would also have had to hear the *other man's* side! If He had done that, His act would have amounted to nothing less than this—a retrial by Him of a case already settled in a court of law.

The law may have been biassed, one-sided and unequal. It may have been wrongly administered and badly interpreted. It may have been weighted like loaded dice. But all that is totally beside the bigger question involved in the man's request,—that Jesus should give some pronouncement on a case legally settled.

"Master," said the man, "speak to my brother that he divide the inheritance with me."

IV

Christ's answer, in contrast with His usual manner, is noticeably stern. "Man," He said—there is a note of aloofness and reproof in that word—"Man, who made me a judge or an arbiter over you?"

There is more than a mere refusal in these words. In the first place, there is a distinct and serious

condemnation of the type of man who put the question and the type of question he put.

If you think of it, the absurd irrelevance of this stranger's request showed that he had not been listening with any spiritual interest to the deep things of which Jesus had been speaking. He had apparently heard Christ's weighty and solemn words,—for he responded to one of them like a parrot,—and then like some silly story-teller, he remarked "By-the-way, speaking about magistrates. . . .!!"

Jesus has really nothing to say to that type of spiritual irrelevance.

But further and deeper, our Lord's answer reveals an implied respect for the system of justice and the recognised officials of His own day.

"Who made me a judge?" He remarked. The only and obvious implication is,—a judge is the one fitting person to whom you have any right to apply! In the social system in which you live and which you permit, the judge has his recognised place and duty; and if law is to stand for anything at all, it is to a court of justice you must have recourse. "Had I been a judge properly appointed, that might have been different. But I am not a judge. Bring your case, therefore, to its proper arena."

That, I think, is the obvious inference from our Lord's answer.

Now, I take this as Christ's recognition of the system of law under which He and we must live.

In His own case, He might well do honour to the majesty and fairness of the law of the Roman Empire. If it may be said that the Greeks gave the world the dream of art and beauty, and the Hebrews the dream of God and true religion, it may as fairly be said that the Romans gave the world a vision of just and impartial law.

But whether He criticised it or no, Christ gave the accepted system under which He lived due and fitting recognition. In effect, His answer amounted to this—if you have a case for justice, bring it to the appointed seat of justice.

V

I think we should not pass this over lightly, as if there were no temptation or dilemma here for Jesus.

In the first place, He knew, as no other man ever did, how unequal and even unjust the best human laws may be. Indeed He actually warned His own disciples against going to law, and asked them to settle their disputes in the higher court of love and sacrifice. Even in the matter of the "sacred law," He had shown how deadly all legal enactments may be, and how barren strict observance may be. And in place of legal exactness He had put the fulfilling spirit of love and service.

Further, knowing human nature as He did, He was aware how open the men of His day were to bribery and corruption. Subtle influences could often bias judgment, and the scales could be judiciously and judicially weighted. He knew that a rich man might often buy justice, while a poor man could only sell it.

He knew also that even with good intention, a law might be questionably administered. Judges, like doctors, could disagree, and could so easily differ on a point of interpretation.

And finally, none knew better that the most comprehensive law can never include all the equities. Sometimes in the framing and administration of law, equity escapes, like the perfume from a rose.

Why, then, did He not take this unique opportunity to let the world see that there might be principles higher than law, and that it might be expedient sometimes to set law aside? Surely He could have shown that He was a greater than Solomon! He could have judged this case in such a striking fashion that He might have given succeeding generations an uplifting vision.

VI

There are some people who believe that Jesus refused to deal with this man's request because He knew that the man was in the wrong. Others

allege that He treated him so cursorily because the fellow was greedy and avaricious.

These are merely assumptions and are as needless as they are unjustified. Even if they were true, they would give us no adequate explanation of Christ's answer. . . . I think we should notice that as a matter of fact, Jesus *did not enquire into the case at all.* Deliberately, I believe. He merely cut the man short with this abrupt reproof, not because he was greedy or because he was in the wrong, but for another and, I think, better reason. Our Lord refused to take any action, because He regarded the matter *as one with which He had nothing to do!* "Who made me a judge or a divider over you?"

I take His answer as a recognition of all properly constituted authority.

In its effect, His reply amounts to this—"We have a system of law in our land. We people, as citizens, are ultimately responsible for our own laws. We make them. Our laws represent the formulated conscience of our people, so far as that can be ascertained. If our social conscience is bad, our laws are bad: and we are judged not only by the laws we decree but by the laws we allow. In fact, every nation has only the government it deserves. Submit your case therefore to your constituted authorities."

I deny that this is an evasion of an awkward

case. Jesus was too brave ever to evade any issue just because it was awkward!

On the contrary, I regard this as a distinct statement of a principle. The principle is this:—since we make our own laws and expect others to abide by them, we must be ready ourselves to do the same. That is the only means by which law can be either sacred or honoured. If the honour of making law is ours, the onus of obeying it is also ours.

VII

I can think of three reasons why Jesus answered His enquirer in this abrupt fashion.

1. To put it in our homely phrase, this was not His job.

He came to declare the Father's will and to give men the mind of God in such a way that they would have big controlling principles of life and conduct to guide them in all details. To have these ruling principles is better and bigger than to have a thousand petty narrow commands. He gave us God's love, God's truth, God's justice. From these, amid our changing circumstances, we may easily devise the rules that are suitable for our own age and fitness.

Perhaps the fact that we must discover our laws for ourselves is part of our spiritual education and the proof of our spiritual manhood. Therefore He gave us no "cut-and-dried" laws: but He so

instructed the conscience that we can frame wise laws for ourselves. In every case, it is the conscience and the heart and the soul that Christ is after. If only He can get our conscience stirred and enlightened, He will have given us a finer gift than if He had provided us with the most perfect code of specified commands and observances.

This agrees with His own judgment of the minute law of Moses. I do not say that He swept the details aside. But if He did not come to destroy it, He came to fulfil it. And His method of fulfilment was to gather it up into a bigger truth, the love of God and man, that love which alone fulfils the law. Christ was concerned with principles, under which details find their due place and inspiration.

Indeed, that a people should make their own laws is their only hope of national salvation! We train young people to implicit obedience in school and in the home, whether they understand why they should obey or no. But we do that, not to keep them forever in leading strings, but to give them the principles by which they may afterwards rule their own lives in discipline and happiness.

That is what Christ wanted.

He stated the broad principles of God's justice, righteousness, and love. From these, He trusts us to make and administer our own laws, as occasion may arise.

2. Jesus answered the man in this fashion because, like most of us, he was laying the main emphasis on the wrong things.

As soon as His enquirer went away, our Lord turned to the people and said, "Take heed and beware of covetousness." Take heed, that is, of any view of life that estimates it by what we have instead of what we are,—the things we can grasp instead of the things we can do and be.

It may be hard for us to understand, but the fact remains, none the less, that Jesus was not really interested in "things" at all. He Himself had no things! No home, no land, no possession, no money. Indeed, when He wanted that penny to answer the conundrum about Caesar's tribute, He had to borrow it from a bystander.

I do not know whether Christ's own programme is possible for us in our complex civilisation. We have to live: and half our life, by a strange irony, consists in making or earning things. But from Christ's point of view, we certainly put too much stress on material concerns. It is a serious spiritual danger. However important they may be, these things dwarf everything else, until material comfort becomes even the test of modern civilisation. The most civilised nation is the nation that has most material plenty! I wonder what Jesus would say to that.

He took this definite line for Himself that we might learn true values, and so might sit less tightly

to the things of sense. We speak with reverence of the sacredness of property. He spoke only of the sacredness of souls.

3. He advised this man to abide by the law of his land, because He invariably did so Himself. He paid His own tribute, when demanded. At the end, He even respected the law by which He was condemned. I do not know anyone who lived a better citizen's life than Jesus.

Christ might easily have claimed for Himself that He was above our poor and inadequate system. Why should He, with His august views, be bound by our pitiful little ideas of what is right and wrong? He must have seen how imperfect our legal provisions were. Yet He submitted Himself fully to the social exactions of His day and its governing powers.

That does not countenance quiescence or supine assent. If we make laws, we can unmake them. But it does suggest the needed spirit of obedience and reverence. If the whole social system is in our own hands and of our own making, it is our duty to plan the best: but when we have planned the best, it is equally our duty to bind ourselves by it. The true way to rectify wrongs is not to disobey law but to alter it. Among Christian people, revolution, in the old or new sense of the term, has no place whatever. The only true revolution lies in remodelling our law.

Regarding this "reign of law," some people think that the Church, Christ's Church should be above the law, or at least should be outside the ordinary statutes that govern other institutions. In former days, this view was most perfectly crystallised in the claim of the Medieval Church that a priest should only be tried by priests: and that a church court should have the power to frame its own legal decisions. I suppose this is an aspect of the ancient privilege that a peer should only be tried by his fellow-peers!

How such a claim on behalf of the Church arose, it is hard to say,—except from ecclesiastical arrogance. For it rests on a desolating view of mankind quite opposed to our Lord's. In His eyes, the lowest and humblest man is the *peer of any peer!* For with Him, there is no difference between men because of status, or position, or ordination, or rank, or money. There is neither Jew nor Greek, Barbarian, Scythian, bond or free. We are all one in Christ Jesus.

That the Church or any individual Christian should demand to be outside the sweep of the law, when Christ made no such claim for Himself, is ridiculous. It is absurd to think that any group of people, living in and by the law, should yet claim to be beyond the law, a self-governing Kingdom within a Kingdom.

This would reduce the whole idea of social authority to an absurdity. But most of all, it

would contradict Christ's personal practice. He Himself submitted to the constituted powers of His day, and He sent others,—this man especially —to the legal system under which they lived for justice and redress.

This does not mean that law is sacrosanct. If law is made, it can be unmade. In this lies our remedy and our challenge. Let us see that our laws are in accordance with the declared mind of God and the love of Jesus. Let us work for finer and juster statutes. Let us point out all inadequacies and expose deficiencies. But what we ask others to respect, let us respect for ourselves.

It is our Christian duty to labour ceaselessly to make our social system perfect. But we should realise equally that no true character, private or national, can be built up or sustained unless in the honouring of the laws which we make or permit.

" Master, speak to my brother, that he divide the inheritance with me."

Jesus said, " Man, who made me a judge? "

Go to the constituted authorities.

VII

THE DILEMMA OF THE CROSS-ROADS

WO main roads swept out of Jericho,—one north, the other south.

At the moment, Jesus was standing at the outskirts of the town. From St. Mark's simple record, we gather that some big emotion seemed to grip and possess Him, thoughts that stirred Him like heaving lava. He looked this way: and He looked that. His soul was plainly in a great torment.

Which of these two ways would He take?

They were roads of diverse fate for Him and the world. In a true sense, the history of civilisation depended on which of these paths He chose to walk. On such things do our destinies hang.

One road, sloping gently to the north, recalled to Jesus many gracious memories of His distant home in Galilee—friendship and tested love—a sure prospect of continuing happiness,—a ripe old age in growing honour and respect.

Should He choose to take it, this north road would bring Him again to the good hearts that loved Him, where He could continue His ministry with deepening appreciation. There, among His

own loyal folk, with increasing honour, He might live as God's great prophet until the rich years took their toll of Him, silvered with age and service. Might He not build a great Kingdom in the years to be?

The other road struck south, up the stony ways to Jerusalem. But by this time, that city, the magnet of all pilgrim hearts, was a thing of omen for Jesus. He understood very plainly that this city meant danger and death. There,—whispering behind walls and conferring at the corners of the streets—hatred and bigotry were clubbing together.

At this very moment, enemies were gathered in an evil league. Many kinds of people who hated each other deeply seemed to hate Him more, and were united to strike down goodness. One might overhear their whispered queries, "Will He come? Will He risk coming? And if He comes, can we lay hands on Him, and end His mischievous work?"

I have little doubt that as He glanced down that south road, Jesus understood very plainly what its prospect held for Him. As His own words show, He could discern that the end of the road was blocked by a cross.

The Son of Man must die.

Thus the road to the north spelt one thing—life: the road to the south spelt its opposite—death.

These were the alternatives hidden behind a simple choice of two roads. Which would He take?

As we know today, not only His own fate but ours depended on His choice. From the human angle, this was literally His last opportunity of decision. The die must be cast here,—this way or that. If He went north, He chose home, love and life: and avoided a cross. If He went south, He placed Himself fully, without escape, in the hands of evil men.

If He went north, He went as Jesus.

If He went south, He went as Christ.

I protest against the common idea that Jesus came to His big decisions with a superb ease and serenity of soul quite alien to us.

Some people imagine that they do Him honour by denying that He had to argue and wrestle with temptation in our quivering fashion. They think it belittles Him to attribute any hesitation or indecision to His mind. But in real truth, these people empty His acts of moral value: for in robbing Him of temptation, they rob Him of victory.

Needless to say, death was no easier for Jesus than it is for us. Some good people, in the same foolish anxiety to do Him honour, speak of the cross as if it caused Him no real concern, as if He took it in His stride as a part of the day's work, indeed, as if He walked up to it at the end with a smile on His lips!

I respect their intention. They wish, no doubt, to show the magnificence of His obedience. But obedience has no value, if one has never been tempted to disobey.

If we wish to have any comprehension of this agony outside Jericho, the fact for us to note is that Jesus,—thirty-three years old,—was no more in love with death than any other healthy man of similar age. Rather, because of His untainted enjoyment, He valued life and the gifts that grace it more than any of us can ever understand. To me it seems not only absurd but dishonouring to say that He was untouched by any of my shrinking agony or my physical aversion from suffering and death. That ends only in cheapening His cross and questioning His moral courage.

At this moment, outside Jericho, we see Him battling with His own oppressive temptations and settling the last issues in His soul.

On the one hand, could anyone blame Him if He quietly steered northwards to Galilee? Like other wise men, He might argue that He could do more good alive than dead. He might establish His Kingdom on solid foundations, and He might give, not three years but thirty years, to the training of His raw disciples. That in itself would be a priceless gain for the Kingdom. . . . In any case, was it not better to be a live dog than a dead lion?

On the other hand, why need He thrust His neck into the noose? Was there any compulsion, real compulsion, that the Son of Man must die? Was there not an equally gracious alternative,—that He might live, and win the world by living?

Outside Jericho, then,—on this road—while the choice is still His,—we see the Master debating the question in its final form, the form that will commit Him for ever. I claim that this scene is the true beginning—I might almost say, the true climax,—of His agony and passion. I believe that He never suffered as intensely again as He suffered here. For everything that followed this scene in time, followed it in effect. It is the supreme moment of His ministry: it is the water-shed of His life.

I place the real Gethsemane here, not in the garden!

I

The scene itself, though sketched in one short verse, is loaded with its own agony. I do not know if the disciples at the moment understood what they saw, but at least the incident left an indelible, if puzzling, memory in their hearts.

It all happened so unexpectedly and oddly. Suddenly, as Jesus and the disciples were outside Jericho, something seemed to master and shake Him. . . . He stepped clear ahead of the crowd.

. . . They were amazed. . . . They were afraid.

Here is Mark's record told in such simple words, *"And they were in the way going up to Jerusalem: and Jesus went before them: and they were amazed: and as they followed, they were afraid. And He took again the twelve, and began to tell them what things should happen unto Him."*

There is something unexplained here.

That Christ striding ahead! Why should that make them amazed and afraid? It is the only record we have of any incident or occasion when these disciples, who loved Him, were filled with nameless dread. They were struck dumb: they were astonished: they fell back in fear!

What accounts for it?

It must have been something in Jesus,—some sign of agony, some mark of uncontrollable emotion, some drawn look,—that startled these loving hearts. I have no doubt that His face became fixed and drawn. I have no doubt that He evidenced emotion. . . . Perhaps as they looked, they saw His fingers clenched into His flesh, till the knuckle-bones showed white with the tension. Perhaps, in the sudden silence and amazement, they heard a groan burst from His lips.

Who can know?

At least, some amazing thing happened. As Jesus strode out in front, these disciples, for the

only time in their lives, were stricken with sudden panic. Fear! Imagine it. Fear! Of Jesus? At least some nameless dread, as they watched and followed.

II

I am not sure whether the disciples fully understood what happened, any more than we do now. I am not sure even whether they linked cause and effect together, or understood the reason of their Master's emotion. That at least is something which we can do for ourselves. For with the narrative before us, we can see why our Lord suffered.

The Master Himself supplied the explanation of His own emotion.

After a moment or two, having relaxed from His overmastering feelings, He turned back to His astonished disciples, and said quietly, "Behold, we go up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man shall be delivered unto the chief priests." . . . Observe the quietness. But that quietness had been bought at a great price, His dedication of Himself.

With these words in our ears—His own explanation—it is obvious what contest of thought had stirred this passion in Jesus. Here, on this bit of white road, outside Jericho, He had finally decided to go to Jerusalem, knowing what it meant.

Here we have His great and final commitment of Himself. He saw the cross, and read it as the mind of God. He vowed Himself now to God, for us.

This, no less, is what He debated and settled here, once and for all.

III

That is why I say that this is the worst moment in our Lord's passion and agony. He never suffered again as He suffered now.

Some of you might question this statement: and if asked to give your view of Christ's darkest moment, you might answer otherwise.

1. Some might point to the real Garden of Gethsemane, that night of unguessed agony, when "His sweat was as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground." Could there be a darker moment than that experience of loneliness and desolation? Surely that was anguish beyond any?

2. Others might picture Him, a King and the Son of God, in the ribald company of Pilate's palace. They mocked Him: they slapped Him: they spit upon Him: they dressed Him out in loathsome mockery. All that He believed about Himself in His own soul was then grossly ridiculed. It was an experience of complete degradation. With the power of God in His heart, that must have been an hour of deep despair!

3. Others again might justly point to the cross itself with all its grisly accessories. Could anything surpass that anguished cry, when He thought Himself forgotten of God and man, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" To wonder if even God has shut His eyes—does that not touch the depths?

IV

I do not lessen the agony of these scenes. Far be it from me! Yet I say that our Lord's greatest moment of anguish was on this road from Jericho, when His emotion so over-mastered His superb control that His strange conduct paralysed His trusting disciples with fear, the only recorded occasion when Christ so affected His followers.

Why do I say so?

When you think of it, a man's greatest agony always lies in his deciding. Just to know what to do, amid the balancing of "pros" and "cons," in the wrangle of possibilities, with the fear of false decision, with the haunting horror of a fatal foolish step, just to make your mind up finally to face some dreadful thing, that is always a soul's greatest agony.

Any of us who has been faced with some momentous decision knows the agony of this moment. When one's whole life hangs on a single act, the decision is compressed passion. There may be people who jest about their decisions, or who can

shut their eyes and leap: but these are not people who look at life seriously. Where there is a soul like Jesus, faced with issues like Jesus, the decision is an agony of perplexity.

On the other hand, once the mind is bent and the die is finally cast, a man may quietly face anything. Our greatest pain lies in clenching our hands and setting our face towards Jerusalem. If we settle that, our decision, once it is made, brings a peculiar peace and power of its own,—a gracious compensation. Having once faced Jerusalem, one may face Jerusalem's cross.

We see Jesus here in the actual moment of His life's decision. If He can settle this, the rest follows as a foreseen part of it. Without any doubt, as we gather from His own words, He knew exactly what this journey to Jerusalem portended. He knew that He was putting Himself into the remorseless hands of His enemies. If He once set His face towards Jerusalem, He took what followed as part of His decision, the outcome of His act.

If He waited behind and took the north road to Galilee—and who could reproach Him, except Himself?—He might save Himself. But He would never be the Christ.

If He went to Jerusalem, He might win the world by the grace of God. But it would be by His own death.

V

Which would He do? Now was the great moment.

The road north and Home!

The road south and Calvary!

Christ indeed at the Cross-roads.

Why do we foolishly limit Christ's "Temptation" to that early dilemma in the desert? It is a thousand pities, for it leads undiscerning people to imagine that the rest of His life was beautifully serene, so different from our broken ways. But it is not true. Wherever and whenever the flesh and the spirit strove for mastery, our Lord was tempted. Indeed, I believe that in the clear light of early hope and radiant faith, the temptation in the desert was easier for His soul than this last bitter agony of consecration. However He was tempted then, He was never more tempted than here, when at last He set His face to go to Jerusalem. If He faltered or failed now, He faltered and failed for ever. Galilee or Jerusalem—which?

In the desert, He had wrestled with Satan. Here He wrestled with God.

VI

This is Gethsemane—on this white ribbon of road!

The other Gethsemane, amid the olive trees, is

a troubled reflection of this. But for this, there would have been no garden scene: and in the strength of this, the garden scene was fought and won.

Having once faced Jerusalem and pledged His loyalty to God, nothing thereafter could ever daunt Him. This carried everything with it. Here He first tasted the bitterness of death.

Stand back, you disciples! We today stand back with you. For we know that as He strides before you, with set face and clenched hands, He is fighting out His last great temptation. He sees before Him the cup which God is holding out. He sees the cross like a dark shadow before His feet. . . . Look at His drawn face! . . . But He has made the great decision and settled His dilemma. He has finished His passion. Gethsemane itself can hold no terror now. Even the cross hereafter is only a means to an end.

He has settled the end. Let God send His own means.

VII

In what does the "agony of Christ" consist?

It does not consist, as so many think, in His physical suffering, but in the anguish of mind through which He faced it. We are inclined—some churches are especially sinners in this regard—to lay too much stress on the mere physical pain

which Christ endured, as if that were the one thing exceptional in His case. But so far as pain goes, every great soul who has died a martyr's death has had an equal share with Jesus. Oddly enough, too, as some of us saw in warfare, the more cowardly a man is, the greater is this part of his agony—the mere pain.

No! . . . The real passion of Jesus was not what He suffered physically, but what He endured in His mind and soul. It was not the pain of His twitching body, but the infinitely deeper pain of squaring His life with God's will, turning His soul in the way the Father pointed, giving Himself for a needy world, "a ransom for many."

You may think He was mistaken in this. But even if you are right, that does not lessen His agony, *if He believed it.* . . . He did believe it. He believed that only by His death could men live. And as He walked to Jerusalem now, He saw that the cross was near.

His suffering lay in the agony of mind to face that.

VIII

Here, then, outside Jericho, finally and fully, He faced the cross. *"Behold we go up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man shall be delivered unto the chief priests."*

I want you to turn your eyes to that figure on the road. Watch Him!

It was no easy thing for Him to face His call. The kind of gospel that makes the cross an easy thing for Jesus, as if He took it all in His natural stride, as if it caused Him no torment, as if He marched up to it with an easy smile,—that kind of gospel is trash, not worth having. It would not save a dog, far less a human soul.

There is blood in the real Gospel: there must be blood in any gospel!

I am not speaking of the physical blood of Jesus. I squirm at the man who dips his hands in the blood of our Lord, and holds them up as a proof of God's love. Strange proof! Blood proves nothing except that it is blood. It all depends on what the blood represents: and even then, it is only a poor physical symbol of deeper things. . . . Physical blood may mean nothing. But there is the blood of agony, and decision, and anguish, and perfect consecration. That is what Jesus gave—and gave here—the blood of hard obedience.

Consciously—knowing what He did—knowing what He faced—knowing the sin of men—knowing the mind of God—He set His face to go to Jerusalem. I like that phrase used elsewhere, "*He set His face.*" A strong anguished face. A face of infinite resolve. A face of sacrifice.

Jerusalem or Galilee?

The south road or the north?

The Cross or peace?
Peace by the Cross.
He made the choice here.

IX

He dared. Why did He dare?

Because He knew. . . . I might have dared, if I had not known. I find that most of my courage comes from blessed ignorance. I do not know what tomorrow holds, or what Jerusalem means: therefore I march breastforwards. If I knew, I should be paralysed with fear. Knowledge would kill me.

He knew.

Because He believed. . . . I dare because I believe that God will make an exception of me and will work a miracle. He will let me escape. Kind God! If I do face Jerusalem, I disbelieve in a cross. He faced Jerusalem believing in the cross: but He believed, as I seldom do, in a God behind the cross. He believed in death, His own death: but He believed that death could not hold Him. He saw a grave, His own grave: but He saw it open to the Syrian stars, with the stone rolled away.

He believed.

Because He loved. . . . Generally, I dare because I do not care. Our great deeds of heroism

are the fruit of desperation. I am often brave, when my heart is dead. If I love too much, I am afraid. Love makes me a coward for the things I love.

He loved.

So outside Jericho, having faced Himself and God, He turned and walked on the south road. Quietly. Resolutely. Every step took Him nearer to a cross. I am glad that the cross was not an accident bravely faced, but an event foreseen and quietly reckoned with.

He settled that here.

The Gethsemane of the Cross-roads.

VIII

THE DILEMMA OF AUTHORITY

FTER that struggle at Jericho, with a pressing sense of awe in His own heart, Jesus had reached Jerusalem.

As He walked through the familiar streets once more, He saw the whole city in a new light. How could He do otherwise? For He saw it now as His great antagonist, and at the end, as His grave. "A lamb to the slaughter."

At least, we know that He saw the *Temple* differently.

No doubt, in His frequent visits during the past years, He had been roused to anger and loathing by the sight of the traders and money-changers who crowded the court of the Temple with their booths and tables. Wise people assured Him that it was indeed a great boon for the pilgrim-worshippers to be able thus to purchase their votive offerings here at the Temple door. This privilege was a real convenience for the pilgrims. Otherwise, they might have had to search Jerusalem for appropriate sacrifices, or perhaps bring their pigeons and lambs from distant Galilee. In any case, the outlanders from Africa and Asia could

have their foreign money so conveniently exchanged for current coin. With a fixed rate of exchange and duly authorised "bankers," this accommodation at the Temple may have been a real privilege and blessing.

None the less, such a commercial invasion of the Temple courts by these bargaining hucksters was grossly irregular. The practice had crept in through the influence of the sons of Annas, and had been condoned on plausible grounds for over a generation. It was a "distinct convenience!" Many wrongs are tolerated in that name.

Besides, it had now been permitted for so many years that it seemed almost a tradition of the Fathers. Custom can gild iniquity! . . . Convenience and custom, an alliance that has broken the back of most reformers!

I

With a heart so deeply stirred by His own complete self-commitment, Jesus came into the Temple. His renewed consecration worked in Him like fire.

We know what He did,—an act so daring and dramatic, so triumphantly autocratic, that it fanned the smouldering opposition of the Priests into a white flame. But that was a risk which His righteous anger must face in such a clear cause.

He entered into the Temple amid the jostling

pilgrim crowds, where they were chaffering with the traders for pigeons and lambs for their altar offerings. With a quick glance around at this sordid desecration, He picked up some ropes, cut belike from the heaped hampers of cackling fowls around Him. Twisting the ropes passionately into a knotted scourge, He called aloud on God's name and began to drive the hucksters and the bargaining pilgrims in a confused medley from the Temple-courts. A choice cleansing indeed! With pure anger flashing from His eyes, He swept the rabble out. In God's name, declaiming against this sordid desecration, He overthrew the tables of the money-changers until their copper coins rattled chimingly on the stone-floors and rolled circling like cart-wheels into every corner of the Temple court.

It is a great scene.

I love this view of His flashing eyes. A fierce, angry, passionate Christ. . . . Then we teach our children to sing "Gentle Jesus, meek and mild." . . . *Mild?*

It is an amazing thing to me that at the moment His drastic deed passed almost unchallenged. But then, one might as well challenge a whirlwind! He had against Him the solid weight of tradition, and public and official tolerance. Yet when He swept them out, as a housewife sweeps out dust, no one raised a word of

protest. They fled from His anger in a moral panic!

Perhaps, they were too astonished and stupefied at His daring! Perhaps, they were too choked with their spluttering rage! Perhaps, they were too busy catching the stampeded sheep and goats, while the money-changers grubbed on their knees after their rolling coins!

Somehow, I think the reason lay deeper than mere stupefaction.

It is astonishing how a brave act, done in a clear cause of righteousness, will render its opponents tongue-tied with shame. They may yelp like scurrying dogs: but apart from their hoarse cries, they know that there is nothing to be said. A good deed, strongly done, is its own best argument.

Some people have wondered how that crowd of interested traders and the greater crowd of worshippers whose needs they honestly served, allowed a lone man like this to hustle them out, with scarcely a note of resistance.

It is no miracle.

It is just the silent even unwilling consent which a brave act of goodness commands—always commands—by striking its opponents dumb with guilt. They had nothing to say.

II

It took the Priests a whole day to recover from their startled rage. Those who were standing by

when the drama was acted were forced to choke down their passion. They knew that if they raised their voice in protest, they would be condemned in the eyes of all just men. For though this trade in the Temple was permitted and condoned, it had not gone without protest. In his own conscience, every fair man knew that Christ's act could not be challenged.

There was a hurried meeting of the Sanhedrin that night, and no doubt a full attendance. What a wagging of tongues, like the angry buzzing of bees! What a screed of slander! Their suppressed passion had now a chance of boiling over safely in private.

In the end, however ungraciously, they admitted to themselves that though custom and convenience tolerated the money-changers, Jesus had a clear case. So when passion had eased itself by expression, moderate counsels prevailed. They agreed to send a deputation, strong and well-chosen, in an apparent spirit of reasonableness, to interview Jesus. They would ask this man a blunt question.

I said a *blunt* question: but it was as sharp as it was blunt.

"By what authority, Sir, doest thou these things?"

Apparently reasonable, but as I hope to show, making a wholly unreasonable demand.

Blunt, but very sharp.

The sharpness of the question lay in this, that it presented Jesus with an awkward dilemma: and His answer to the dilemma meant much for His ministry.

III

Obviously, there are only two straight answers to this question. Whichever of these two answers He gave, Jesus would sacrifice His reputation with the populace.

On the one hand, He might say openly and clearly, "My authority is from God. I do these acts in the name and by the Spirit of God."

If He had said this, what would have happened?

For the first time, He would have given these biassed priests something they desired, something also which He had carefully withheld from them, —a handle by which they could hold Him on a distinct charge of blasphemy. Christ had still work to do, definite and necessary work. He had this last rich week of service to live. We know that He never openly courted His own death. If the cross came, He would face it. But on no occasion did He ever say or do anything that would deliberately hasten or precipitate the end. While He did not fear or shun it, no one can honestly assert that He fanned the flame of hate.

On the other hand, if He said, "My authority is from men and out of my own heart," He would

have ruined His character as a prophet with the people, besides saying what was not true. If He admitted that His authority was only the assurance of a strong, courageous human character, He might bid farewell to any hope of winning the people or winning us.

This was a dilemma, with sharp prongs.

IV

It was a well-laid plan, begotten in the cunning of hate. They hoped to make Jesus pronounce His own sentence, and become His own executioner. Whatever way He answered this apparently reasonable question, He dug His own grave.

So in the morning, when Jesus had returned from Bethany and was walking in the courts of the cleansed Temple, they came to Him and put their catch-question, almost as if they were asking a reasonable explanation which they felt to be their due.

"By what authority doest thou these things?" By "these things," they meant not only that single dramatic act in the Temple, but His whole career as a prophet and preacher.

But they were reckoning without their host.

To begin with, Jesus does not consider what a man asks so much as the spirit in which he asks it. The heart behind a question makes it sincere or insincere. Indeed, according to the mind of the

man, it may not be a question at all, but only a trap.

He had proclaimed the answer to their question a thousand times in their hearing. He had said, openly and often, that His charter was from God, and that He was God's messenger and God's Son. It was not as if He now refused to answer their query. What He refused to answer was its spirit.

Further, no one can really produce *credentials from God,* as he would produce a written character from his breast-pocket. The truth of God has to be judged, not on outside evidence or outside authority, but for itself. That is the only way in which it can be judged. Truth does not ask for any outward authority: it asks only for inner assent.

But most of all, Jesus believed as a principle that no man need ever give account to others for doing the work of God's Kingdom. Goodness is its own best guarantee. If it is not, what is there in heaven or earth that can guarantee it?

This scene reveals to us what it was that "angered" Jesus in all His dealings with these priests. They were supposed to be the official preachers of goodness: yet they wilfully shut their eyes to all the goodness of our Lord. In His view, this vicious attitude of soul was akin to the unpardonable sin. For in order to defeat Christ's

goodness, they asserted that He did His gracious work by the aid of the devil! . . . A man who says *that,* is standing in the last ditch in his resistance to God.

V

We know how Jesus turned them off.

Not, mark you, because He was afraid, or because He was unwilling to answer. We know that He had answered their question every day of His life, when any seeking soul sought His help. But He now refused to give an answer to their specious question because He discerned the *vile spirit of their heart.*

But I am wrong. He *did* answer them.

For He generously gave them a blessed opportunity of answering themselves,—which is the only way in which this type of question can ever be answered by anyone.

In giving His reply, He took the great and noble instance of John the Baptist, that incomparable prophet of God. Everybody knew the work of John, and everybody had been given a full opportunity of judging him.

This was an argument from the less to the greater. If they could answer their own question in regard to John, how much more clearly could they answer it in regard to Him?

Tell me this now,—a Roland indeed for their Oliver—tell me this, " The Baptism of John, which

you all know and with which so many of you were baptised, the Baptism of John, was it from Heaven or or men?"

Answer me!

This counter-question of Jesus is not an evasion, but is the necessary preliminary to any serious answer of their own question. For Christ's question is the plainest test of their sincerity and genuineness. If they were genuine people, they would have no difficulty in answering Him regarding John. I want you to observe that had they answered Him fairly, as well they might, Jesus would have dealt as fairly with them. He was always fair.

We know how they replied.

The deputation drew off to a corner of the courtyard and whispered solemnly and secretly together. If we say "of men," our lives will be in danger, for the people revere the sacred name of the Baptist and count him a prophet of God. No, we dare not say "of men." . . . If we say "of God," we shall be playing into His hands. We and not He will be in a cleft stick: for He will turn at once and say, "Why, then, did ye not believe Him?"

I can imagine the whimsical yet pitying eyes with which Jesus looked at them as they conferred together in the corner. He watched and waited with amused eyes.

At last, when they had debated the matter to their own satisfaction, they came forward and said, "Master, we cannot tell."

Christ looked at them, seeing deep down into their hypocritical soul. I do not know any more austere and withering answer than His. "Neither do I tell you by what authority I do these things." . . . Go!

Whited sepulchres!

VI

What explains Christ's answer?

Insincerity explains it. Subterfuge explains it. Deceit explains it. A lie explains it. That is all! These men were thoroughly dishonest, with themselves and with God.

Should Christ have answered them? And was His reply only a clever evasion?

In the first place, Christ does not answer, then or now, people like these. We know how readily and graciously He deals with all honest enquirers. When a member of this party, a Scribe, came asking one of the petty dialectic questions of the day —in his case asking it honestly—Jesus answered Him as honestly as he asked it. "Which is the greatest commandment, Lord?": and when Christ answered him, the man marvelled. There was no needy seeker whom Jesus did not treat with infinite courtesy. But there are types of people and types

of questions, insincere or sneering, with which He will have nothing to do.

It is well for us to know this.

But further, He answered their question in the perfect way. For had they been sincere or eager for light, He gave them a clear lead and guidance how they might answer it for themselves. Naturally, as religious leaders, they ought to have been able to answer that question about John. They had seen him and noted his power. They had first-hand facts about the marvellous reformation he had wrought. Therefore, it stood to reason that if they could answer regarding the Baptist, they would have no difficulty in answering regarding Jesus. It was simply an argument from the less to the greater.

But such men steal the sun out of their own skies.

VII

I wish you to see how perfectly and fully Christ answered the question of these priests. For His notable reply states some broad principles, that mean everything for us.

In the first place, no good man ever needs outside authority to permit him to do good. The only authority is that of his own conscience and his own Master. Righteousness lies in the nature of things,

and its own "rightness" is its only guarantee. If a thing is good, it is already established eternally as the only thing that has a right to be! A good man holds his charter from no man, and need answer to no man. He holds his charter from no Church, and need answer to no church. He holds his charter direct from God and from God alone.

It would be a queer world if we had to give reasons for doing good, or were forced to quote authorities for being virtuous. For the authorities would be less than that which they were supposed to authorise! You can never authorise goodness by saying that it is expedient or fitting or proper: you can only authorise it by saying that it is *good!* Its only authority lies in itself, in the nature of what it is.

If you will not dub me an extremist, I shall tell you what it all amounts to. . . . If it were borne into the minds of most good men and women that the only way to righteousness is the wrecking of every den of iniquity in this city and the clearing of defiling houses by the high hand of force, then to those who asked and demanded *authority,* I should feel inclined to say, "Goodness such as this needs no buttress except its own pure self. A good act is the only thing in the world that has an absolute right to be."

A boy friend of mine once took a reel of thread and a bamboo-cane, and began to tie a twenty-year-old lime tree to the cane to "keep it safe."

That is no more laughable than the attempt to authorise goodness such as Christ's by quoting authorities that are infinitely less than Himself. By what authority do you thus cleanse the Temple? And the only answer lies in the *act itself*. It is a pure act of God: it is a deed of goodness that authenticates and justifies itself.

Christ's answer states a second principle.

The Priests asked Him for a special sign of authority, something out of the common, by which they might be convinced. But they had all the ordinary authority before them that a reasonable soul can either expect or possess. They had the authority of His works, His life, His words, which in common with everybody else they might have judged with an open mind. But that did not satisfy them. They wanted some startling signal sign of His claim to be what He was and do what He did.

Jesus had settled this temptation for Himself in the Desert. He resolved to win or lose men by ordinary ways of reason and appeal. He might have used the extra-ordinary: but He put that aside as unworthy of Him and God. He resolved to appeal only to the mind and heart and soul of men, —their reasonable nature.

In this instance, the Pharisees are practically asking Him for a little private miracle to substantiate His claims. A little private miracle or a big public miracle—what does it matter? They

are equally beyond the self-imposed scope of Christ's work. He will preach God and God's truth: He will appeal to the human soul: but beyond that, He will not go. If men do not choose Him for the worth of His message, for its essential appeal to the human soul, He can do nothing more.

"By what authority doest thou these things?"

"I ask you to use your reasonable mind and soul in judging the great message of John, as it appeals to your reason. What do you think of John's message? When you have settled that, by the great gifts God has given you, tell me what you think of mine? If you can do the one—as you ought to do—you may more easily do the other."

We know enough about Jesus, enough about His life, His work, His character and His message, to enable any and all of us to come to a decision about Him. And it is *we* who have got to come to a decision! He stands among us and quietly asks us "Whom say ye that I am?" Tons of additional evidence would not satisfy a man who cannot be satisfied with what there is.

There is a third principle.

The religion of Jesus is a faith. In saying this, I do not contrast faith with knowledge: only fools do that. The genius of the Christian faith is that it looks forward one day to *perfect knowledge!*

. . . But I contrast faith with *authority,*—that ancient, and very modern, passion to have some outside guarantee on which we can lean. So many of us do not trust in Jesus for Himself, but we trust in what lesser authorities say about Him! We trust, for instance, in an infallible book, or an infallible church, or in some infallible expert. It is pathetic to see how so many modern folk ask for some authority on which they are going to rest their views of Jesus!

We are cursed with experts and authorities. It may be a church, or a book, or a creed, or a man,—what does it matter? It is the same irreligious thing. "Authority" is always irreligious!

Our love of experts! . . . If a noted scientist pronounces a dictum—often a wild guess or a leap of "faith"—we go twittering around and fire him as an authority at every hapless soul we meet. "Surely you do not believe that? Have you not heard what Professor So-and-So says?" That settles the poor wight,—especially if the scientist owns a fine foreign name which your hearer is ashamed to say he has never heard before!

Or we quote an article in a creed, made in ancient days by "experts." This is what the creed says, you poor mouse! And the poor mouse dare not cheep.

Or we quote a church. Here is the authority of the saints and fathers, the decrees of the Church. This is what *they* said: this is what *they* laid down

for us. Surely you do not set your little mind up against *that!*

We take everything today—our thinking, our ideas, our education, our statecraft, even our religion,—from the hands of specialised authorities. It is sheer mental ruin, especially in religion. "What think ye of Jesus?"—and you for yourself are as able to settle your personal relation to Him as any scholar that was ever born. Jesus believed that the simplest soul could accept Him fully as Lord and Master, and could do it,—nay, must do it—out of his own heart and mind. Jesus is His own and only authority.

By what authority, then, doest thou these things? God's or man's? Jesus did not evade the question. But He gave the Priests the only answer that is ever possible. *Be ye the Judges!*

It is always and only a matter for your own soul.

IX

THE DILEMMA IN THE GARDEN

AT Jericho, in perfect faith, Jesus had cast the die.

In that moment of vision, when He weighed the offers of Fate, He had resolved to face all that Jerusalem might hold.

What did it hold?

Whatever we think of His forecast of the cross, at least the most hesitant of us must admit that He knew the certain danger of His decision. The hatred of the official classes was now such an angry and bitter thing that He would have been more blind than the least discerning of us had He not known that Jerusalem meant plotting and death.

He knew it. He had known it long.

Now that the Sadducees, the princely priests of Jerusalem, had joined forces with the Pharisees and lent their political distinction to the opposition, the reception that Jesus would receive in the city of David was only too sure. So long as the Pharisees and Scribes alone were His opponents, the issue might be considered purely religious. If so, Pilate, as a typical Roman, in line with Rome's generous

policy of toleration, would have nothing to do with it. Like Gallio, he would "care for none of these things"! Rome allowed a fine liberty in religious opinion.

When the weight of the Sadducees and High Priests, however, was thrown solidly into the scale, the matter became dangerously political. For the first time, the possibility of a trial before the Procurator, on a political charge involving death, became a probability, if not a certainty. The Sadducees by their social influence could easily ensure that.

Knowing this danger and yet facing the ordeal, Jesus came to Jerusalem. With these clear eyes of His, He foresaw exactly what His act involved. Again and again, for the comfort of His disciples, He had spoken plainly of His death. After that striking incident at Jericho, it would be simple folly for anyone to imagine that Jesus was taken by surprise.

Surprise? . . . *The Son of Man must die.*

Why need He have come?

There are people who say that by His coming, He forced His own death upon Himself, and thrust His neck into the noose. A little prudence on His part might have averted it all. Since He knew that Jerusalem was ready to be inflamed, He could have withheld the one spark that lit the fire, by withholding Himself. Did He not play into the hands

of His enemies, and also precipitate His own end by this rash adventure to Jerusalem?

Such a view misses two crucial things.

In the first place, it misses the most important of all considerations, the character and mind of our Lord. In talking about the death of Jesus, the one thing we must remember is Jesus Himself. To Him, duty and His own idea of God's work meant everything. The Father had given Him a great work to do: and He would do it. He could not have been the Saviour of the world, had He been untrue to Himself in any way.

He knew there was danger, which focussed itself in a cross. Should He have allowed this inner knowledge to influence His outward movements? . . . Even with an average acquaintance of our own, what would we think of him, if he balked at duty because it was dangerous? . . . Though there was grave and deadly danger out there in Flanders, that did not keep your sons from going there! What would you have thought of them, if it had?

In the second place, this criticism misses Christ's own view of His mission.

He believed that He came not only to tell people about God, as you and I might do, but to show them God, to exhibit God. His message was Himself, not only what He said but what He was. His

life and teaching witnessed to the love of the Father: but He believed that the most startling and perfect witness to God might be His death. Yes, He believed this—that His own death, if it came as the fulfilment of duty and love to God and man, would exhibit the very heart and soul of a redeeming Father.

No! We cannot judge Jesus or His acts apart from His own view of Himself and His work.

"The Son of Man must die," He said.

Must?

What is the meaning of that strange word?

There would have been no "must," of course, had He gone from Jericho northwards to the slopes of Galilee, back to His loving friends among whom He might have lived in great honour. But as we know, He regarded that possibility as dire retreat and dereliction of duty. To shun Jerusalem was simply to deny God. If therefore He kept to the way of truth and the mind of His Father, He must face the Capital. His own divine sense of service called Him.

The argument in His heart was not "*I must die,*" but "*I must face God's call whether I die or no.*" If obedience to God summons me to Jerusalem, I must go: and if there is a cross, I must not shirk it.

The "must" lay in the obedience of His own heart. It was not the "must" of outward neces-

sity but the deeper "must" of inward faithfulness. "No man taketh my life from me, but I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again." . . . The only thing I have not power to do is to deny God and my own conscience.

The argument, therefore, is as plain as it is exalting, "The Son of Man must be true to God. God calls me in my heart to Jerusalem. Jerusalem means a cross. Therefore the Son of Man must die."

Some people speak as if there were miraculous virtue in the Death of Christ *as a mere death.* There is none. We have all to die some day, naturally or by violence. The virtue in any death consists solely in the motive and the sense of duty that lie behind it, which alone give it moral value. It is not the bare simple fact that Jesus died, that may redeem us; it is the greater fact of why He died.

Christ died because He loved the world.

So He came to Jerusalem.
With open eyes!

I

I wish you now to see Him among the olive trees in the Garden of Pain, where He faced one of His extraordinary dilemmas.

They had left the Supper-Table.

Jesus, even in speaking about His on-coming death, had been marvellously serene. There was a singular composure in every word He spoke. Look at these passages again, and you will see a calm controlled Christ. In the institution of the Supper itself—which, remember, was a forecast of His death,—He was the epitome of restraint and quiet assurance. "Take, eat, this is my body, which is broken for you." Could anything be more composed than His whole personal conduct during these last few days, and especially these last few hours?

Then Judas, that twisted soul, departed on his evil errand. Slinking through the moonlit streets to follow Christ to the Garden, he went to those who had bought him and asked for a band of soldiers. Jesus and the eleven stepped out of the friendly house and made for Gethsemane.

They crossed the brook Kedron.

Bishop Lightfoot remarks that all the blood from the sacrifices of the Temple altars was drained into this little stream. Perhaps at the moment that Jesus crossed it, the water was running red. If so, there was soon to be a greater sacrifice.

The blood of lambs.

The blood of The Lamb.

The little enclosed garden, planted with straggling olive trees, was a favourite resort of our Lord. It was a place of quiet, especially at this time, amid the clamour of the droves of foreign

pilgrims who jostled each other through the streets of the city. We may imagine it, if we will, as a private garden on the hillside of Olivet, perhaps the property of a secret friend, a place certainly where He was welcome and where He could be sure of seclusion and quiet.

By the sacred association of memory, places may come to have a peculiar message for the human heart. We have known of cases where the vision of a lonely hillside, an old whitewashed farmhouse with eaved windows, or a little island long-unvisited but long-remembered, has melted a hard heart into unwonted tenderness.

So for the last time, as to a remembered place, Jesus turned towards Gethsemane, the garden of Olives. Like a wounded stag making for the high slopes, He set out for this quiet garden where He could face His big hour alone. He had a tryst with God and His own soul.

I wish to emphasise the marvel of His composure up to this point.

He entered the garden quietly. As quietly, He asked His disciples to lie down in the cool summer night and rest. Taking three of them with Him—the three who had shared great experiences with Him of old—He went deeper into the olive trees. Bidding the chosen three watch with Him, as if He felt a need of human fellowship and sympathy, He went forward Himself alone.

So quietly! So assuredly!

Then, alone by Himself, His great heart broke. Falling on the ground, He cried aloud with anguish, again and again, "Let this cup pass from me, O God. Let this cup pass from me." An anguished soul, stretching out imploring hands to God.

As they first heard His agonised call, I can picture the questioning eyes with which the disciples gazed into each other's faces in the distorting moonlight. Then, weary beyond words, after that hectic week in Jerusalem, sleep had its gentle way with them. And if they still heard His cries, it was as those who hear in broken dreams.

He was now unheard by any except God.

II

Why did He cry?

Did He repent His decision? . . . His own words and His own acts fully answer that. "Let this cup pass from me: nevertheless, not as I will, but as thou wilt." There is no possible room for repentance or regret in these words. That decision made at Jericho, to face Jerusalem and all its possibilities, had been made once and for all. His words suggest only an infinite trust in God, and certainly there is no regret in His heart.

Did He only now realise, as a man in warfare might, that death was startlingly near? . . . Our

records show that for a long time He had reckoned with death, not as something which might be, but as something which must be. We know that He had opened His heart on this matter in repeated warnings to the disciples. In that Last Supper itself, He had declared His mind, and made His death a sacrament.

Was He suddenly afraid with the natural shrinking of the flesh? . . . It would be foolish to say that Jesus had no natural human fear of death: but, on the other hand, the one thing about Him regarding which any fair man may be sure is that He was no coward recoiling from suffering because of simple physical pain. The perfect proof of this lies in the later events. After this scene, He went through every conceivable form of brutal treatment and the sharp pain of the crucifixion without one murmur. Without one selfish murmur! Apart from that solitary cry, "I thirst," and the beautiful commitment of His own soul to God, our Lord's words in His dying were uniquely impersonal. With all other men, pain drives their thoughts in on themselves: pain drove His thoughts out for others. . . . In itself, a note of uniqueness!

Was it a sheer nervous breakdown, such a momentary spiritual collapse as might overtake any sensitive over-wrought soul? . . . If so, we have to explain two astonishing things—His magnificent and reasoned calm before, and His even

more magnificent and more reasoned calm immediately thereafter. Five minutes later, when He faced the rabble of Judas, He was the only composed and unflurried person in the entire crowd. A nervous collapse does not work like that!

Was it a fierce gust of self-pity, that He, a young man of thirty-three summers, had now to leave the joys of life and friendship? He had a love of life, like any of us. Was this experience just a spasm of bitter self-pity? . . . To begin with, Jesus sat lightly to life in a way that few of us can estimate. The world and its ways had no hold on His heart. Moreover, as we know, He was not bound up in possessions or wedded to things as we are. He loved life, it is true: but He never loved it better than God. All through His ministry, He lived solely in the belief that the Son of Man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister. There is no room for self-pity in a mind that thought as Jesus thought.

III

Not one of these things accounts for this garden scene. The fullest allowance for the shrinking of a highly-sensitive soul completely fails to explain this fierce dread.

Especially with one like Jesus.

Why did He cry?

It does not lie with us even to imagine that we

can understand a soul like His, or can comprehend the thoughts that passed through His mind. There are depths even in a fellow-man's suffering that we can never plumb. How much more with Christ?

Yet it may be a spiritual gain for us to observe three things.

1. Quite evidently, this was a passionate return of that inner debate which He had held with Himself in the Contest in the Desert.

There, as we remember, He had been tempted to accomplish His mission in different ways. Not necessarily evil ways, but ways that "differed in excellence." Indeed, the debate about possibilities was the soul of His temptation. . . . Here, again, as He faces the last things, He is tempted to ask Himself the same question. *Is there no other way?* Must He redeem the world *thus?* Is He shut up to the Cross?

In vision, He sees the Father holding out the cup in His hands for Him to take. But . . . but . . . is it possible for the cup to pass? Is there no other way?

"Let this cup pass from me." That is a definite petition to God, a real anguished prayer. I hold that we can make nothing of these words that will be worthy of Him or the occasion unless we see that He *was tempted,* quite definitely, to let the cup pass. Why should He not ask this question and offer this prayer? If He had not asked it, He

would have been a mere automaton, and not a suffering debating soul like me.

I should not care to think that the cross was an easy thing for Jesus, a cheap thing, a light thing. His self-committal is the dearer to me that it was terribly hard. We know that Jesus faced it in sweat and tears. These tears baptised His full obedience.

It is a cheap, cheap gospel that makes the thorny way of duty easy for Jesus, as if it cost Him nothing. It cost Him—yes! it cost Him,—blood and agonies and tears. What more could it cost Him?

I think we can only value His finished work as we see the deep passion of debate. Pray God we see it! That He should debate it, is no sin. That having debated it, He should fully accept it, crowns Him Christ.

2. I do not see how this scene can be explained, for a person like Jesus, by any theory that does not take account of its shame.

The apostles, who were so near to Him, meditated deeply on His work. As they reflected on the agonies they had seen Him endure, they came to the clear belief that it was the *shame of the Cross* that broke Jesus down. The Epistle to the Hebrews speaks openly about this "shame of the cross." What does that mean? Not only that one like Jesus should die thus,—like a common criminal —but *that He should hope to redeem the world*

thus! . . . Thus! By a cross? . . . Why! the idea was a joke to the Greeks, sheer foolishness: and it was a cruel offence to the Jews. That cross seemed to them the last unutterable thing.

Bowed and prostrate there among the olive trees in agony, this dreamer hoped to win and redeem the world for God. A great dream! So great a dream that it should be nobly fulfilled! . . . But look! To perfect this great dream, God was now offering Him a cross! This emblem of shame. This ancient curse. To redeem the world! A cross where they butchered slaves. A cross where they slew their rogues. When we contrast this starless night with the glorious dawn of the Baptism, we can understand the questioning in His heart. Is this the only means by which God can be perfectly obeyed? If this was the Father's chosen way of redeeming the world and answering Christ's glorious consecration, it was just a path of simple shame. No less.

Would Jesus accept it? He came to do the Father's will: but was there no other way? Must He walk this grim road? *Let this cup pass.*

You do not honour Him, remember, by thinking that there was no revulsion in His heart, and no agony of debate. This cup! If ever a prayer was passionate, this was.

3. Our only comprehension, however partial, of the agony and dread of this scene in Christ's heart

lies in our reading it wholly in line with His own words.

After all, what a man thinks about a thing makes it good or evil, hard or easy for him.

A young officer, hardly more than a school-boy, joined our battalion in France. The captain of his company sent him out early for a reconnaissance in No-man's Land. His fellow-officer who accompanied him, reported afterwards that the boy was useless, as he was so evidently possessed with uncontrollable terror. I remember how his companion remarked grimly that he had been afraid lest the lad's chattering teeth should alarm the enemy! Next night, when he heard that another party was being sent out, the boy-officer, as pale as death, came and asked the captain to allow him to go. His senior remonstrated and spoke kindly of his conduct on the previous night. "Yes," said the lad, "but I want to get used to it, Sir, and I want to conquer myself."

Now, it meant nothing—sometimes only a joke—for many a strong-nerved man to crawl through that slime in No-man's Land. But what did it mean for this boy, with his high-strung tingling nerves? I hold that you can estimate his act only when you remember *what he was thinking!* The state of that lad's mind put the sheer courage of his act on a plane totally different from anybody else. So much of our average courage is of the animal. This was of the soul!

I am certain that we can only understand the agony of Jesus, when we relate it to *what He thought of Himself*. That alone gives us any glimpse of His mental and spiritual debate.

Many another man has gone to a cross without the quiver of an eyelid. Why not Jesus? One of the two thieves on the cross joked and swore. Why not Jesus?

Why should He be lying on the ground as twisted as any of these gnarled olive trees themselves, with strong cries breaking from His heart?

The truth is,—it is the only thing that explains the scene—Jesus regarded Himself in a unique way, a ransom for many. He read an unutterable meaning into His own sacrifice. For He regarded Himself, in His death, as carrying the sins of the world, and as being identified with His burden. He who knew no sin was *made sin*. And in His own mind, it is the thought of the sin of the world that breaks Him down. That He—the Son of Man—should die—thus—for that! A cross—for that!

Nevertheless, Thy will be done.

IV

In the light of this—as I think of this—I can have a glimpse, though I cannot express it, of what passed through the Saviour's mind, as He lay that night amid the olive trees. I can see a pure and stainless soul: Himself clear of sin: Himself

hating sin: yet giving Himself for sin: to bring men to God. It is not only that He is going to die, but to die *thus* and *for this end,* that constitutes the agony of Jesus.

When He had given Himself, when He had fought through the storm and brought His will to the service of God, the anguish passed clean out of His heart. In one view, this is the most amazing fact in Christ's life. He was heaped with contumely and pain and desolation: He was scourged and ridiculed: He was crowned in ribald mockery. Yet these last few hours are the most serene of His ministry. Never was His majesty so supreme as during these Court scenes. I cannot explain it. Can it be explained? I do not know whether I wish it explained.

Some of you, puzzled with the agony of this Garden scene, may insist, "Why did this anguish never return to Him amid all the gathered abominations He suffered afterwards?"

I have told you that I do not know. If I were to venture one explanation which has helped my own soul, it would be this:—a cross once gladly accepted ceases to bring pain. In God's will, He found God's peace.

With a new and strange light of conquest on His face, Jesus looked up.

There through the twisted trunks of the trees, He saw a flare of swaying torches and the glitter

of spears. Judas with his motley band! Judas who of old knew this quiet retreat and remembered how the Master loved its spangled shade! Judas who had lain with Him only yesterday among the olives!

Coming to the sleeping disciples—alas! for the third time—Jesus touched them quietly and said, "It is enough. The hour is come. Lo, he that betrayeth me is at hand." This is a mystery of beautiful composure and quiet faith.

And so, having fought His battle and settled His dilemma, He walked forward, with a controlled soul, to meet Judas and death.

Poor Judas!

Into the woods my Master went,
Clean forspent, forspent.
Into the woods my Master came,
Forspent with love and shame.
But the olives they were not blind to Him,
The little gray leaves were kind to Him:
The thorn-tree had a mind to Him
When into the woods He came.

Out of the woods my Master went,
And He was well content.
Out of the woods my Master came,
Content with death and shame.
When Death and Shame would woo Him last,
From under the trees they drew Him last:
'Twas on a tree they slew Him—last
When out of the woods He came.

X

THE DILEMMA OF SILENCE

O speak or not to speak?

That last crowded day, with its swarming audiences, seemed to offer Jesus a unique chance. He had already wrought some arresting deeds in Jerusalem; and now His capture had raised interest in Him to the highest pitch. The Halls of Judgment and the open Forum were alike packed with greedy listeners, keen to know the charges brought against Him and as keen to hear His defence.

This was a great final chance.

Would He take it?

On the one hand, here at last were the real leaders of the people, the great men in high authority. He was now face to face with the men who wielded social and religious power. The whole Sanhedrin, gathered in mass, was before Hm. Surely an unparalleled occasion for stating His case and defining His startling claims!

On the other hand, here were Pilate and Herod, whom He had now an opportunity to impress. At least, they were open-minded men without any of the inherited bias of the priests. They would

weigh up the charges in all fairness, and give His claims a just and impartial hearing. Why should Jesus not use this last momentous chance for a full statement of His mission? His judges might be unimpressed: they might even sneer: but He could at least deliver His soul of its burden. If He declared His message the issue lay with them.

And between these two extremes, there stood the mass of the people gathered from every available quarter of the Jewish world. During this Passover time there were thousands of pious pilgrims from the four corners of the globe. They had heard flavoured tales of this man's words and works; and they would gladly avail themselves of an opportunity to see and hear Him. The fact that the whole atmosphere was electric would be wholly in His favour. He might now deliver Himself of His message with the abandon of a martyr.

A martyr! . . . In any case, have not martyrs always used these last dramatic moments for some great declaration? Even as they stood among the licking flames, they have eased their souls by a final proclamation of the truth.

Although He should be condemned, should not Jesus tell this cosmopolitan crowd, fully and boldly, that He was come from God? What an audience to address, even though they should batter Him down for blasphemy!

To speak or not to speak?

I

How did He settle this dilemma?

They brought Him first, before dawn, to Annas.

This aged man, ex-High Priest, had never seen or heard Jesus. He had been for long "the power behind the throne": and what he could not effect by official power, he effected by unofficial intrigue. If He could impress Annas, Jesus might do wonderful work. For this old priest could make and unmake people: and his word was a thing of power. According to our records, he seemed anxious to investigate and understand the prisoner.

Would Jesus avail Himself of this chance?

We read, for instance, that Annas questioned Jesus regarding "His doctrine and His disciples." This was a subject, surely, which would appeal to Jesus. His *doctrine*—just to tell this priest of all the truth of His heart, to unload His soul of its burden, and to expound the grace of His message. . . . I know that in countless other instances when people came to Him enquiring about His doctrine, His eyes lit up with eagerness. He opened His heart and emptied it of its deepest secrets. So fully, so gladly.

Annas questioned Him regarding His doctrine.

We read that He refused to answer him directly but referred him to the testimony of others.

Why?

They took Him afterwards to Caiaphas, High

Priest of the time, son-in-law of Annas. This man was the actual head of the Jewish Church government. If the priesthood represented anything of God, this man represented the priesthood. He had around him the whole Sanhedrin of wise men who governed the church. This was truly the Jewish parliament: and it offered Jesus a unique opportunity.

We know that He answered some of the High Priest's questions: but there are certain of His silences before this man that are difficult to understand.

When the witnesses, for instance, had stated their lying case against Him, Caiaphas asked Jesus if He had anything to say. "Answerest thou nothing?" the High Priest cried. "What is it that these witness against thee?"

"But He held His peace and answered nothing."

Why?

They brought Him next to Pilate, the Roman Ruler.

The charge now was one of death, and the death-sentence lay in the hands of this man alone. He was a Roman: and as a Roman, he was trained in the principles of justice. It was a proud boast, fully justified, that one might expect a fair hearing and an honest pronouncement in a Roman court. This was one of the glories of the great empire. . . . Perhaps, this was the chance for which

Jesus was waiting? He may certainly speak here without fear or favour.

We read that Pilate asked Him, "Whence art thou?" Again he asked, "Hearest thou not how many things these witness against thee?"

"But Jesus yet answered him nothing: so that Pilate marvelled."

Why?

In the midst of the trial, when Pilate overheard the chance word "Galilee," he sent Jesus to Herod, the ruler of Galilee, who was then in Jerusalem. No doubt, the Roman Procurator adopted this device in the vain hope of ridding himself of the puzzle of this man's judgment. It would be a wonderful way out of an awkward business, if only Herod would take the affair in hand. Perhaps he might!

If ever a man was glad to see Jesus, it was Herod. We read that "when Herod saw Jesus, he was exceeding glad: for he was desirous to see him of a long season, because he had heard many things of him: and he hoped to have seen some miracle done by him." Surely this offered a wonderful opportunity for Jesus! A man unprejudiced by Jewish bias, full of natural expectation and keen curiosity, trained in Greek ways and with that fine "latitude" of the Greek mind. A King, moreover, with his court about him,—a chance in a million. . . . We read that Herod "questioned

with Him in many words." The suggestion underlying the phrase is that he sought to draw Jesus out in diverse ways. Question after question!

"But He answered him nothing."

Stern stony silence. A mute Christ.

Why?

II

This is a strange picture of Jesus. It makes me afraid. An austere, silent, judging Christ. He stands there before these questioning men like a statue. Is it possible that some day when I speak to Him, "questioning with Him in many words," He may be as stonily silent?

What accounts for it?

I cannot help remembering another and brighter picture of my Lord. I see countless seeking souls flocking to Him in distress. They lay their vague needs before Him, their sins, their sorrows, their fears, their doubts. He welcomes every case so genuinely, and He deals with each in unexampled courtesy and grace. Not one of His suppliants departs disappointed. He seems indeed to labour and agonise to make Himself plain and clear to the simplest or most darkened mind. If they seek Him, He as surely seeks them!

I know, further, that the reason of this present silence cannot be that these men were sinners. He welcomed sinners: He loved sinners: He sought

sinners. His enemies nicknamed Him "The Friend of Sinners," a nickname that is now our glory. That Woman at the Well was a sinner; yet He strove with infinite patience to make the way plain for her puzzled and stupid mind. Zaccheus was a sinner; yet He charmed Zaccheus with His unexpected and overwhelming kindness. Mary Magdalene was a sinner; yet He gave her what all men denied her, the forgiving grace of God and the friendship of His own respect.

When these notable men spoke to Him, why was He silent? With this unique chance of a great declaration before the assembled people, why should He answer nothing?

To speak or not to speak? Which would He do?

But He held His peace.

III

I can only judge of the debate in His heart by the debate that might have been in my own. I should have argued something like this:—Here is my last great chance. These gathered expectant masses. These notable men. A final declaration of my message, though I should die for it. A great proclamation of God. A martyr's last confession. Then if need be, the fire!

Why was He silent?

1. *A broken heart?*

Those who say this forget that He was not

wholly silent. He answered some questions before His varied judges with spirit and fire. Indeed, He was never more conscious of power and His own strength than at this moment. "Thou couldest have no power against me, except it were given thee from above." That is not the speech of a broken heart, but of one that is perfectly sure of itself and its own grounds of confidence. If He is mute, it is not because He is stunned!

2. *Afraid to commit Himself?*

As little afraid as ever. "Art thou the Christ, the Son of the Blessed?" And Jesus said "I am." That is as plain a statement and answer as any man could either give or expect. No one need ever make any mistake regarding Christ's view of Himself and His own vocation. He came to tell the world who and what He was. He told it.

3. *Disappointed at events? This unexpected turn?*

Unless the whole record of His life is sheer invention, He not only foresaw the end but walked towards it. Death did not *overtake* Him in any sense: He met it. I can see no room anywhere for believing that Jesus was *surprised* or *astonished* at the turn of events or at the acts of men. He spoke to His disciples in repeated warnings, foretelling His end, lest they might be too astounded when the great blow fell. "The Son of Man must die." He knew that, and openly faced it.

4. *Afraid that God had forsaken Him?*

Listen to this quiet word which reveals, more than anything, His perfect trust in God. "Hereafter shall the Son of Man sit on the right hand of the power of God." That is assurance of a supreme order. You may discredit His claim, if you care. But at least, it is assurance. Clear confidence in the Father He loved and served. I do the Father's will!

IV

Why did He refuse to answer certain particular questions and certain particular men?

I might have taken this whole occasion as a glorious opportunity of open speech. Could there be a better starting-point, for instance, than that blunt question of Pilate, "Whence art thou?" Why did He pass that by? And the whole interview with Herod—not one word? As I hinted, the record suggests that Herod "fired" questions at Him, like shots from a machine-gun. But He stood in complete silence.

I believe that the answer lies in the type of men who put the question and the type of question they put.

Let us look at the men.

Annas. . . . Years ago, when Jesus had been a boy playing in the fields and lanes of Nazareth, this man had been High Priest. He was a man of

singular power and as singular ruthlessness. For a discreditable act, as haughty as it was cruel, he had been deposed. But though thus deposed and discredited, he had remained, by intrigue and wire-pulling, the secret power behind the throne. He had successfully manoeuvred four of his sons into the High-priesthood, and the present High Priest, Caiaphas, was his son-in-law. Thus by his artifices, he had made the High-Priesthood a family preserve!

He was wise enough to know that it was not the nominal power but the real power that mattered. If he was now old in years, he was older in cunning. He had shown himself a man without scruple or conscience, a political adventurer more than a priest of God. It was he and his sons—"the booths of the sons of Annas"—who made a monopoly of the Temple sacrifices, and coined easy money out of its desecration. He filled his coffers by turning religion into a "protected" trade.

His real power was shown now by the simple fact that the band of Judas hurried Jesus to him first of all. If anybody could worm a charge out of this prisoner, Annas could.

When Jesus met Annas, the two eternal principles of honour and cunning stood face to face. This is not really the meeting of two men, but of two systems, two ideas of life, and two views of God. Christ or Annas? That is the eternal and

elemental conflict in this world, the spirit of worldliness and the spirit of other-worldliness. On the one hand, the pure perfect soul of Jesus, as clear as that blue sky: on the other hand, that old figure huddled in the chair, a heap of wizened cunning, who had held to evil power by underground intrigues and deceit. Christ or Annas?

Now tell me! . . . What had one like Jesus to say to one like that?

Caiaphas. . . . Of the breed and kidney of Annas. This is the man who lives for ever in history as the father of an immortal epigram. That epigram is one of the coldest pieces of cynicism that a callous mind ever coined. It is a heartless tag of political wisdom that reveals the man's coldly brutal heart. "It is expedient," he remarked, "that one man should die for the people." This is the true gospel of the scape-goat! What does it matter about a poor devil of a scape-goat? If the dragon is hungry, throw him a man. It keeps the dragon quiet!

Here is the true apostle of expediency. A man who can damn a fellow-man with an epigram.

Now tell me! . . . What had one like Jesus to say to one like that?

Pilate. . . . Poor Pilate! He had been reared and trained in the honoured Roman traditions of justice and law. Great traditions! Great

law, the foundation-stone of all modern law! Yet he twisted that iron system like a piece of putty in his supple fingers. In his weak and indifferent way, he tried to do justly. But justice needs a fearless heart and a scorn of consequences!

Thou art no friend of Caesar, Pilate, if thou let this man go free. That settled the matter. The threat of complaint! So he delivered Jesus into their hands. Then, in a melodramatic pose, he washed his own hands. Stained hands, that water will not cleanse!

Now tell me! . . . What had one like Jesus to say to one like that?

Herod. . . . The King who was a Greek poseur: who in a drunken riot for a drunken vow gave John the Baptist's head to a dancing girl: the libertine who at that moment was living in married shame: the affected trifler who wanted to see Jesus perform a few conjuring tricks, miracles by order!

Some time ago, Jesus used a phrase about this man that is unique in Christ's vocabulary. As we know, our Lord could fearlessly denounce classes and sects and parties: He could lash ideas and customs. But I only know of one individual soul whom He scourged with a phrase. "*That fox,*" He said of Herod. It is the one instance in the New Testament where Jesus slew a man with a killing word.

Now tell me! . . . What had one like Jesus to say to one like that?

V

There are some men to whom Jesus can give no answer. Speech would be wasted breath. Pearls before swine! His silence is their judgment.

If we look at those occasions when Jesus was silent and at the questions which He refused to answer, we may discover some principles that will be an encouragement and warning to ourselves.

It is good for us to see this austere Jesus.

1. Jesus always refused to answer anyone who tried to trap Him.

We see this in many striking instances. Pharisees, Scribes and lawyers came frequently with cunning questions that they might "catch" Him. They dug awkward holes, hoping that He might trip headlong into one of them. But on every occasion, "perceiving their wickedness," He turned their questions adroitly aside.

For instance, no one thinks for a moment that a man like Annas was in any deep spiritual anxiety about Christ's "doctrine"! His only purpose was to entice Jesus to speak that he might pounce like a hawk, with his ancient cunning, on any incautious declaration. Annas was presumably the Judge: but he was also the prosecuting cross-examiner: and all his apparently interested ques-

tions regarding Christ's doctrine were only sly cunning, slyly disguised. He was out for prey!

And that reference to His disciples! Did he wish Jesus to mention their names that he might jot them in a book for future use?

Like this man, Nicodemus once spoke to Jesus about His "doctrine." How gladly, how patiently, how graciously, our Lord answered the blundering scholar! There was no puzzling detail that He was not ready to explain.

Annas spoke to Jesus about His "doctrine." Jesus refused any exposition.

Why? . . . *He will never answer patent insincerity.*

2. Jesus has no answer for those who pre-judge Him.

He wants us, He asks us, to judge Him. "Whom say ye that I am?" He welcomes every honest enquiry regarding Himself or His claims. But pre-judging is not judging. It argues a closed mind and a shut heart. That is fatal.

Caiaphas, for instance, already knew what he was going to do with Jesus. There was no room in his mental outlook for such a prophet with such a view of God. When Christ looked at Him, He was looking at a shut gate, locked and barred. In any question Caiaphas might ask, there was no real desire for information or enlightenment. Jesus had been "judged" already,

judged before He appeared at the bar: and His judge was now only angling around for a decent pretext of getting Him condemned before Pilate. This "trial" before Caiaphas was a mockery of the name.

John the Baptist once judged Jesus hardly. From behind his prison bars, he wondered if this type of preacher could possibly be the Messiah? Jesus answered the disciples of the Baptist in gracious ways,—"Go and tell John."

Caiaphas judged Jesus. Jesus was silent.

Why? . . . *He will not answer those who condemn Him before He is heard.*

3. Jesus has no answer for a poseur.

Affectation of life or belief—(if it is ever possible to "affect" a belief; some think it is)—is at the opposite pole from the natural ways and mind of Jesus. He Himself was so perfectly sincere and real and earnest. He preached truth, and was truth. And if you will notice, the one thing that roused His anger was pretension and sham. He never had anything to say to affectation and unreality. He lashed the Pharisees, not because they were sinners, but because they were hypocrites.

That pseudo-Greek with his affected Hellenism would like now to see Jesus and ask Him some questions.

One day a disciple came to Jesus and said,

"Master, there are Greeks at the edge of the crowd who would like to speak with you." We read that Jesus was deeply moved and praised God!

Herod, the pseudo-Greek, questioned Him in many ways. He was silent!

Why? . . . *We can never see God through a mask.*

4. Jesus has no answer for a dishonest doubter.

"Whence comest thou?" said Pilate. The Roman had been told that this prisoner claimed to be the Son of God, the Messiah, a King. But Pilate, amid his broken and discredited gods, was a cynical sceptic. He regarded the "religious Jews" with a sneer. We know that he had no place in his thinking either for a life with God here or a life with God hereafter. Indeed when they spoke of the "sons of the Gods" at Rome, it was generally with a sneer or a snigger.

When the Woman at the Well spoke to Him about the Messiah, Jesus answered simply, "I that speak unto thee am He." She had practically asked Him Pilate's question "Whence comest thou?" With a magnificent respect for her groping mind, He answered her beyond her asking.

"Whence comest thou?" asked Pilate. Jesus was silent.

Why? . . . *He deals with doubt, but not with dishonest doubt.*

5. Jesus has no answer for a man in love with his sin.

That man Herod had imprisoned John because of the prophet's just reproof of his wickedness. He hated and feared the preacher who exposed his evil. At this moment, unabashed, he was living in open shame. He had flaunted his gross conduct in the eyes of a scandalised generation. But now that he was in Jerusalem, he would gladly see Jesus! Perhaps the Nazarene prophet would do some miraculous turn like a juggler. At least, he would question Him and learn His mind.

That woman who was a sinner, a soiled rag, crept to His feet and washed them with her tears. Jesus gave her the benediction of His forgiveness.

Herod, the sinner, asked Him many questions. Jesus looked at him in stony silence.

Why? . . . *He loves sinners, but not sinners in love with their sin.*

VI

This last great chance.

Will He take it?

Now they are gathered in their sweltering masses, travellers and pilgrims from many lands. The leaders of the people are there, the great men who now hold His destiny in their hands. Pilate and Herod are there. Even if He is to die, perhaps He will make a martyr's last declaration.

A dramatic message for God!

But He had reasoned with them in full measure for three rich years. Going in and out, He had preached God's message and Kingdom, opening up God's word and God's will. He had refused all dramatic and startling methods at the outset of His ministry. Could He begin them at the end? He wished no message delivered on the crest of passion and amid turgid emotion. Amid all this fear and passion, He Himself is now the quietest and most restrained person in all Jerusalem. For after Gethsemane, the strong serene composure lasts unbroken to the end.

The day of speech is past. It is now the day of action.

His words had not won them.

Perhaps the Great Act would?

Since then, the Cross has been the world's silent sermon.

XI

THE DILEMMA WITH JUDAS

IF Judas had a dilemma as to what he would do with Jesus, Jesus had an equal dilemma as to what He would do with Judas.

This lost disciple, the enigma of the world, lures our thoughts as steel is drawn to a magnet. But perhaps in dealing with the intriguing problem of his character, we forget the other problem lying beside it, as real and insistent—the relation which Jesus held to him and his perfidy.

The whole attitude of our Lord to the traitor is worth consideration. We may find it useful to endeavour to look at the question from the angle of Jesus, so far as that is possible.

Why did the Master choose a disciple like Judas?

Was He aware of possible danger in this man?

When was He aware of danger?

When He became aware of it, did He treat Judas wisely?

Was there any way in which the traitor might have been saved from himself, in spite of himself?

Did Jesus acquiesce in this man's act as if he

were an appointed means, foreordained by fate to this perfidy?

These questions may introduce us to Christ's dilemma.

I

To understand Judas in any sense, we dare not come to him, as we generally do, with a ready-made theory, and then attempt to squeeze the facts to suit our theory. That is ruinous with any man, but especially with him. Moreover it is not just either to Judas or Jesus. In all honesty, we must face the facts. The only facts I know of are given in the New Testament.

If we do face these facts, we shall at once rule out some fine sweeping judgments. In any case, I distrust fine sweeping judgments! Especially about complex things like human beings! We cannot crush a man's soul into a generalisation or an epigram.

Some say he was a devil incarnate.

If this slanders Judas, it slanders Jesus more. Is it conceivable that our Lord could have chosen such a man for an apostle? If Jesus knowing this had called him as a disciple, choosing him, as it were, for a predestined instrument, I should have no further use for Jesus.

Some say he was a misguided saint.

This view, buttressed by the literary special-pleading of De Quincey, is condemned by one thing—the facts. It may be generous and beautifully charitable on our part to picture him as a Messianic enthusiast who believed in Jesus and only wished to force His hand and make Him declare Himself: but it is not true. Unfortunately, the New Testament presents a different picture.

Some say that he was not normal.

I wonder what they mean. Is anybody normal? Judas was a man who thought and reasoned and laughed and sinned like any of us. He had our range of possibilities, for good or evil. I have no doubt that he had a Mr. Hyde hidden in his Dr. Jekyll. But so have I! There can be no doubt that he committed his sin, as I do mine, by letting the evil within him triumph.

Some say he was chosen to be the traitor.

I am sorry for any man's view of God, who can imagine this. That this poor wight was staged from all eternity to play the villain—no! God does not run His world like that! And if we add this taint to Jesus,—what a Jesus! It is a poor way to account for Judas by dishonouring Christ. A cat playing with a mouse! . . . I know enough of the hatred of the priests to be sure that Judas, as an instrument for their vengeance, was

an accident. They were glad when he came, of course. But if he had not come, their hate would have devised another means. Hate, like love, has this touch of genius, that it invents its own instruments.

Some say that he was a traitor all the time.

From start to finish! Jesus chose him honestly: but the disciple was dishonest and hypocritical in his own heart. . . . Is there not enough against this man without this? If we refuse to dishonour Jesus, I think we ought equally to refuse to dishonour Judas! . . . Apart from his stern warnings, it is a remarkable thing that amid the opprobrium of the world, Jesus in His subsequent dealings treated this man only with an overwhelming pity!

II

What are the facts?

There are three at least that no fair man ought to forget.

1. *Judas chose Jesus.*

He followed Him for one reason only, because he loved His company. Christ attracted him: Christ chimed in with all his dreams. We must remember that this disciple was a Jewish nationalist,—perhaps the only pure Jew of the twelve: for the rest were Galileans. He saw many of his hopes focussed in this astounding preacher. He brought

his dreaming soul, narrow but dreaming, and laid it down at the feet of our Lord. He listened to Him: he followed Him: he lived with Him.

That may make the mystery of his treachery all the deeper in the end. None the less, this is the big fact. He *chose* Jesus! He threw in his lot with Him, from interest and enthusiasm. The prayers of generations seemed to be gathered up in this prophet.

2. *Jesus chose Judas.*

This is the bigger fact of the two. Our Lord discerned latent possibilities in this man. He had the makings of a really great apostle, with distinctive qualities.

There is no other reason that can account for Christ's choice, unless we are open to harbour unworthy ideas of His selection. This nationalistic Jew,—keen, ardent, gifted, passionate—might have become one of the foremost of the disciples. Our Lord certainly chose him first as a disciple, and then as an apostle. That means, after probation, experience, and approval!

3. *Jesus honoured Judas.*

I said that Judas *might* have become one of the foremost of the apostles. For a time, he actually was. He exhibited such marked gifts of administration and organisation that Jesus promoted him to be treasurer of His band. This appointment meant more in those days than it might mean with us. For in the work of such a wandering band as

the disciples, this appointment carried with it all the arrangements of organisation, billeting and budgeting which such a roving company demanded.

There is only one worthy conclusion: Jesus and the disciples *trusted* and *honoured* Judas. If you are able to imagine that our Lord knew this man to be covetous and weak, and yet gave him an office that furnished countless natural opportunities for deceit and fraud, I pity you for your view of Jesus. For myself, I could not forgive in Him, what I could not forgive in any other.

For the credit of Jesus, there is only one conclusion from the facts of the case. At this time, Judas, the young man of Kerioth, was keen, honest, capable and brainy. He had gifts and qualities that easily singled him out for Christ's notice. Any other theory contradicts the facts, and defames our Lord.

III

Thackeray remarks that circumstances do not change our characters, but only bring out their latent qualities.

After the first year of His ministry, circumstances changed with Jesus in a rapid somersault.

In the first place, the great crowds forsook Him, as we saw in the Dilemma of His Popularity. He Himself broke their foolish attachment deliberately.

Further, His message changed in intensity and

trend. He began to teach the disciples deep and hidden things. He openly forecasted the end. "The Son of Man must die."

Moreover, the opposition and enmity of the Ruling Classes deepened and darkened. Any chance of a great political and social movement receded into the dim background. Jesus centred His work chiefly on the training of the Twelve. Some of that training seemed bitter and unpalatable doctrine. A Messiah on a Cross!

This change of meaning and emphasis worked subtly on the heart of Judas.

Strong passionate men are often narrow and biassed. When such passionate men are disappointed, they become brooding. Brooding, disappointed, and disillusioned—it is an easy step to hate. We hate the thing that ruins us and breaks our hopes.

When hate enters into a passionate and narrow soul, it twists its whole nature. Nothing any longer remains sacred. Judas, the nationalist, became morose and twisted, morally and spiritually. He felt as if his early hopes—the very hopes that had first attracted him to Jesus—had been shattered, and his dreams had been ruined. He had been made a laughing-stock by this dreaming unpractical idealist of a Christ. . . . Curse Him! It was a bitter business.

The apostle has now become an apostate. He

harbours a grudge against the innocent cause of his own undoing.

As well make something out of the wreck! *He put his hand in the bag.*

His twisted cynicism and despair began to bespatter everything: for a soul awry sees everything awry. He even misread the passionate and repentant love of the woman who was a sinner, and he decried her enthusiasm as ludicrous and wasteful. His excuse for his muttered grumbling is only another symptom of his spiritual decay. . . . *The poor!* What was he thinking of the poor?

His soul died before his body.

Jesus saw the change gradually. He could see it in no other way, for the simple reason that the change itself was gradual! The last few months ripened the man's challenging irritation quickly into disappointment and moody hate. It was all a lost cause! There was no hope for a New Israel from an ineffective man like this! He scorned the source of his disillusionment, that dreaming, unpractical Christ. What a Christ!

IV

Whether there had been a Judas or no, Jesus knew that the Cross was near. The gathering storm was rumbling in the distance, and there were black clouds hanging over Jerusalem. Envy, anger,

hate among the leaders and priests! If He went to Jerusalem, it was a city of fate. Even now, they had resolved on His death.

Judas was an accident, though the Cross was not.

After the implied reproof in that gracious incident of the Repentant Woman, Judas hardened his heart. No doubt in his unhealthy brooding state, he took the general reproof of Jesus as a personal affront. This final scene where Jesus showed the love and gentleness of His heart, revealed also the kind of Messiah He was, and showed Judas what a hopeless and ineffectual person he served.

Jesus saw this final change, and took His own measures.

Have you ever wondered why our Lord was so noticeably "secretive" about His preparation for the Passover Supper? "Where wilt thou that we prepare?" His disciples asked Him. He replied, "Behold, when ye are entered into the city, there shall a man meet you, bearing a pitcher of water: follow him into the house where he entereth in."

Why all this secret preparation? And against whom was it devised?

Against the Priests? I think not.

Against Judas? Yes.

The hour was not yet come.

For on the previous day, the traitor had stolen into Jerusalem. He had sought out the Rulers, in

his moody and disillusioned bitterness. Well might we believe that they were "glad" when they saw him. This man, one of His own disciples, was a windfall! He promised to seek a speedy opportunity to betray Him, in the absence of the multitude. Some quiet moment which he, as a disciple, could command.

Thirty pieces of silver! Was that the price they put on Jesus?

Rather, it was the price they put upon Judas! He could be bought cheap.

I do not think he really bargained for money. Had he done so, he could have screwed them up so easily to many times the price. They wanted to be rid of Jesus at any cost. As it was, they bought the Master for a slave's purchase. I think in his dark bitterness, Judas would have taken anything or nothing. The actual bargain no doubt was suggested by the Priests. *It bound the man!*

It is a poor, poor view to think that Judas sold Jesus for cash alone. His, like ours, was a complex soul, and had many motives. If money was one thread of the piece, it was only a thread. I think that in his sullen anger, he hardly listened to the talk of the priests. He nodded his head. What did it matter? . . . If money had been his sole desire, he would have played for higher stakes: and in the end, his money would have satisfied him. It always does. People who sell big things for

blood-money ask big prices: and at the last, their money is their solace. It heals regrets.

But Judas at the end threw the clattering coins on the Temple floor. They hurt him like a curse. And then his dead body kept his dead soul company.

After the bargain, he rejoined the circle of disciples. With what thoughts—a wolf in sheep's clothing!

As yet, no one save Jesus suspected the man. The others had too much love for Him to believe that any of their number could bear such malice. As for Judas himself, he kept his own dark counsel. Secret sin makes all of us accomplished actors. God alone knows what distorted thoughts and obscure motives chased themselves through his twisted brain!

Meanwhile, all through that sacred meal, his ears were open wide to catch any hints of plans and appointments. Something first-hand for the Priests!

In his brooding and revengeful soul the purpose was now so deliberate and sullen, that all Christ's striving could not touch him. It was not the sin of one rash moment, quickly done and quickly regretted. That we could understand and forgive. But it sprang from a kind of dour and disappointed vengefulness, that watches its chance like a bird of prey.

But unknown to him, other eyes, kindly eyes,

were reading his sullen soul. Ever since that incident of the penitent woman who had lavished her ointment on the Saviour, Jesus had been watching this man with pity and concern. Now, He sees that the silent processes have ripened, and that Judas has cast the die in his own mind.

It is one thing to be tempted: it is another thing to fall.

Now that he has fallen, now that the temptation is accepted, Jesus can deal with him.

V

How did Jesus deal with him?

In the first place, all through their long communion together, He had treated the disciple with the same courtesy and favour as He had extended to the others. At that time, remember, Judas was a man of promise. He was as honourable as his own name,—before he ruined that ancient name for ever.

Further, when the crisis came and the mob forsook Him, Judas was equally in the counsels of Jesus. Our Lord must have seen that some at least of His disciples were tempted to leave Him, for He asked "Will ye also go away?" But in the end, Judas stuck with the rest and remained in the inner circle of twelve, to whom the Lord opened up the deep things of His ministry.

Then towards the end, when the time was ripe, the Master began to speak more pointedly of His

death. This definite acceptance of the cross was the last straw for Judas. He had no use for a Christ like that. The other disciples, equally with him, had possessed crude ideas of the Messiah. "Grant unto us that we may sit, one on thy right hand and one on the left hand, in thy glory." But Judas was a Jew, a passionate loyalist Jew, from the Judean village of Kerioth. His expectations had been deeper and more bigoted. When Christ proved a broken reed for their narrow desires, the others by this time had formed a personal attachment to Jesus that took the place of their vanished hopes. A love for the Master, a real friendship, an undefined belief in Him apart from His programme! But Judas evidently had nothing of this. When his hopes collapsed, there was no personal love to take their place and hold his loyalty. He lost himself in his own disappointed bitterness.

How did Jesus treat this new development?

By open and covert warnings that would have touched and turned another man! . . . You ask, "Why nothing stronger? Were there no means more effective than this?"

The only method that Christ ever took with any soul, Judas or another, was reasonable spiritual persuasion. He laid Himself and His message in the hands of men, and left the decision with them. If influence, warning, and appeal could do nothing to turn Judas from his treachery, Christ could use

nothing else This was in line with the strict spiritual programme defined in the desert.

He might have cut him adrift.

He might have dismissed him from the company.

He might have used force and restraint.

But none of these was really possible, if Jesus were to be true to His own ideal. You may urge that He knew the character of Judas and that Satan was seeking him! But He knew the character of Peter, and that Satan was seeking him! In one sense, Peter's character was a more dangerous and explosive thing than that of Judas. Should Jesus therefore have cut Peter adrift, lest the lower elements in him triumphed?

So far, the point to remember about Judas,—as it is the point to remember about any man—is that up to the last he was *saveable,* as saveable as Peter. And if anything could save him, it was the gracious winning and appealing conduct of Jesus, as shown during these last days. That saved Peter: and it could have saved him.

VI

Than Christ's conduct during the Supper itself could anything be more winning?

To begin with, there was that silent sermon in drama, the Washing of the disciples' feet. If ever vaulting ambition and angry passion were rebuked, it was there. If ever the nobility of lowly service was evidenced, it was there. But more! For while

He was engaged in this menial office—a great rebuke to all the contentious disciples—He gave Judas a strong personal warning. As He washed their feet, He said, "Ye are all clean." Then He added, "*But not all.*" I think He said these words as He was on His knees before Judas. "*But not all.*" At least we can be quite certain that nobody but Judas would understand the meaning of these cryptic words. It was Christ's kindness of heart that purposely made them cryptic. Had he been impressionable, Judas would have felt the sword beneath the velvet.

Would it influence him. if he knew that Jesus knew? It would influence you and me!

This passed.

Then Jesus tried him from another angle.

We read that as He pondered on all that lay before Him—the hour was gathering fast—His soul became deeply moved. He saw a shadow of the cross athwart the table. Out of His emotion, forgetting Himself and remembering the hapless traitor—indeed, speaking to none but the traitor—He said, "Verily, verily I say unto you, that one of you shall betray me." Could warning and pleading be plainer?

Yes, it could.

For He turned at once and made the spiritual issues clear. "Woe to that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed." And then, like a knell,

"Good were it for that man if he had never been born." . . . If Judas resists pleading, he shall at least know the bitter fruit of his acts. This is the nearest approach to a warning curse that Jesus ever uttered!

Perhaps He can yet frighten Judas from his evil?

In Christ's gentle way, everything was made abundantly plain to Judas, but kept delicately covered from the others. So covered indeed that it threw the group into blank amazement! They even began to wonder if they themselves, in spite of themselves, could ever betray Him.

Urged by the others, John, lying at Christ's right hand, leant back his head till it touched Christ's breast and whispered, "Lord, who is it?" And Jesus whispered back, "He to whom I shall give the sop." . . . When He had dipped the sop, He gave it to Judas Iscariot the son of Simon.

I ask you to remember that this conversation had been whispered. Otherwise, there were some hot souls there—such a fire-brand as Peter—who would never have let Judas leave that room alive!

It was whispered.

Judas knew nothing of the private meaning of that sop. Except this—*that it was the sop of honour!* The others, jealous children, would glower at him when Jesus thus honoured the man of Kerioth. This indeed was the mark of the highest distinction,—that the host of a feast

should single out the "great guest" and honour him thus.

What did this mean?

Remember the by-play between Jesus and the traitor. Had the heart of Judas been less set and less hard, he would have seen that the Lord, though knowing his treachery, was yet willing to receive him back, and let by-gones be by-gones. This sop of honour, if we may use the term, is Christ's great "bid" for the loyalty of Judas!

It was a silent appeal to honour.

But all that was puzzling Judas at the moment was just the remaining shred of doubt whether Jesus really *did know* that he was planning treachery. Did He know? Or was He only talking in general terms?

Did He know?

So taking his courage in both hands, he resolved to settle the doubt. Being the treasurer of the party and one in high honour, he was seated near the Master. Leaning forward, he asked in an undertone, drowned by the general heated conversation, the same question that the others had asked. "Rabbi, is it I?" Jesus turned to him and answered, also in a whisper, "Thou hast said."

His villainy was known.

Would this stop him, if he saw that Christ knew and yet forgave? It would break me down.

It failed.

A few moments' silence! Jesus was giving him his last chance. These few moments are as dramatic as any in human history.

Suddenly Jesus turned.

The first note of sternness creeps into His voice. Aloud now, that all might hear Him, He says to Judas, "That thou doest, do quickly." If your heart is set on this, I cannot stay you. Do your heart's errand!

The innocent disciples, unconscious of that personal dialogue between Jesus and Judas, imagined that the Lord had given him, as treasurer, some command or duty—perhaps bread for tomorrow, or alms for the poor. . . . Otherwise, I repeat, with such a fire-brand as Peter, Judas might not have left the room alive!

It is plain, I trust, that Jesus in His love for Judas strove with him in searching spiritual ways for his own soul. More He could not do. So far as force was concerned, from the earliest day, He had resolved to be as clay in the potter's hand. Had He resorted to strong ways, now or later in Pilate's court, He might, in His own words, have called down hosts from above. But if He had done that, He would have succumbed to the precise Temptation which He had once settled in the Desert. *Force for His own ends!*

Thus, to all spiritual striving, Judas was cold as iron. If we re-read these scenes, we shall see how

our Lord tried to touch and win him in every loving way. But at the end, when tenderness had done its work in vain, there was only one thing left to say, "That thou doest, do quickly."

God cannot save a man who will not be saved.

He that will damn himself, let him be damned.

VII

This is the defeat of Jesus,—a soul He could not win.

Then came the dramatic departure. Judas rose from his couch and walked from the room. The door slammed. I can hear it now. "And it was night." Night around him, and a darker, deeper night within.

Knowing that Jesus was going to the Garden, the traitor went post-haste to the priests, and from them collected a rabble of retainers and soldiers to effect the arrest. Even now they feared this man of power! So they came with swords and staves to beat Him down!

But as they trudged through the silent streets, someone called out in the darkness, "Stay! Stay! How shall we know this Nazarene when we meet Him? None of us has ever seen Him face to face."

This was indeed a knotty point.

"How shall we know Him? It would be tragic, after all this preparation, if we blundered in the dark and brought back the wrong prisoner!"

Judas thought quickly.

Holding up his hand, he stopped the straggling mob. "None of you know this man: and the night is dark. When we draw near, I shall give you a sign. Listen! The man whom you must seize is . . . the man whom I will kiss."

They nodded their heads in the darkness, and passed the word along the line.

"It is the man whom he will kiss."

XII

THE LAST DILEMMA

UR Lord's life is like a sublime piece of music through which, as a motif, there runs one steady haunting refrain. It is always there, and most there when unnoticed. That refrain may be expressed in these words, "If only men would believe in Me! If only men would accept me as Lord and King!"

We know that this was Christ's passion and prayer. A personal faith was the one claim He made upon men, all men. Wherever He found such faith, He rejoiced openly. Wherever it was lacking, the very virtue seemed to dry up within Him. He could do nothing without our faith.

On the one hand, we remember with what peculiar joy He greeted any exhibition of human faith, especially if it came from unexpected and unlikely quarters. He praised that Roman centurion because the man's trust was deeper than any He had found even in Israel. He healed that woman who crept forward through the jostling crowd and touched the hem of His garment, because though her faith may have been ignorant and superstitious, it was yet deep and real It is a joy to know that

amid many rebuffs from those who should have received Him with enthusiasm but who only regarded Him with slanting eyes, He had gracious instances of adoring trust among simple people that gave Him abiding happiness. We praise God for all those,—often humble souls—who brought joy to His heart.

On the other hand, we remember how it hurt, worse than the thrust of a knife, when the people who should have welcomed His as a friend and ally, treated Him with doubt and scorn.

The official leaders of religion, for instance—the Priests and the Scribes—treated Him as an outcast, and thereby gave Him His deepest pain. "He came unto His own, and His own received Him not." He might have expected better things from these people of privilege. But privilege may be as much of a curse, as a blessing. Where He might have expected faith, He found only narrow bitterness and vicious hostility.

In the same way, in His own village and countryside, He could do nothing notable. His townsmen considered that they knew Him too well to believe that He could be a prophet! "He did not many mighty works there, because of their unbelief." I do not think we realise sufficiently how much His rejections must have hurt His soul. We can only realise this by seeing how openly He rejoiced when He met faith in unexpected quarters. The one side throws light on the other.

Thus, from first to last, Christ's dream was to awaken and command faith,—faith in His message and Himself. If only He could win their faith! That is the refrain that runs through His life and ministry.

This was such a ruling passion in His heart that He had been tempted at times to use less worthy means to secure it. That bitter scene in the Desert is sufficient proof of this. There, in contest with His own soul, He had debated various possibilities how He might attract and grip the faith of His generation. How could He do it? He felt that it was almost worth anything to secure this.

In the end, as we know, He settled His own God-like course. He chose to honour both God and man by laying God's truth plainly before man's reason; and on the other hand, He refused to use any charlatan methods that would either dominate or paralyse human faith or assent.

But it is good to remember that He had been deeply tempted to win this faith at any cost! His victory in the Temptation lay in His glorious decision that some costs were too dear!

If men would only believe in Him?

I

He is now on the Cross.

We do not grasp some of the deeper meanings of this scene, if we do not remember that the same refrain runs through it. "If men would only be-

lieve." That is as much the refrain of His death as the refrain of His life. In fact, as we know now, the cross was His last bid for human love and faith.

They had taken Him in the Garden by the artifice of Judas. They had led Him away like a captured criminal. They had tried Him,—if you may call it a trial—before the High Priests, the Sanhedrin, and Pilate. In the end, the Roman Ruler, badgered from pillar to post and threatened with vindictive complaints to Caesar, had weakly given in to the clamour of the mob. He had delivered Him into their hands. A sport for ribaldry!

It was an age that knew little mercy. It was an age so little disciplined or law-abiding, that it purposely invented excruciating public forms of death to act as a restraining fear upon the people. Perhaps we wince at their barbaric ways, and wonder if they are bone of our bone. But it is not many years, is it, since we too used to hang our highwaymen on a gibbet at the cross-roads? Also for a warning to evil-doers!

I do not speak of the pain of the Cross. I think we dwell too much on the pain of the Cross. Certain Churches at least do. . . . As we have seen in an earlier chapter, our Lord's greatest pain was not physical, but mental and spiritual. It was the mental pain of such a death, for such an end, that tore His heart. From the angle of mere pain,

many a martyr has suffered more. But no one has ever suffered the spiritual agony of Jesus when He gave Himself a ransom for many.

"They that passed by reviled Him, wagging their heads, and saying, Thou that destroyest the Temple."

It is not for us to judge the morals of a past age by the morals of our own. Therefore we must accept without undue comment the remark in our records that they mocked and gibed at Him on His throne of a cross. It is easy for us, reared in gentler days only made possible by Jesus, to call them devils incarnate, and to gasp at their depravity and barbarism. But if we live in a changed world today, with purer mercy, the credit is not ours. The credit belongs eternally to that silent figure on the cross. For in deeper ways than we know, His death has been the *life* of the world.

One of these gibes, now historic, must have struck Jesus worse than a blow. The Chief Priests—men of privilege but not above the level of the other jesters—cried out, *"Let Christ, the King of Israel, descend now from the cross, that we may see and believe."*

"That we may believe." It is His own old refrain echoed mockingly.

How it must have hurt!

When Jesus heard it, I can imagine that He shut

His eyes and pictured Himself for a moment back in the Desert. He could readily recall the scene of agony: it was graven on His soul. Again He was at the threshold of His work, with the door swinging open. He was beating out its aims and objects for God and Himself. Satan whispered in His ear, "That pinnacle, Jesus! Climb it, and throw yourself from the top. God will surely hold you up! When you drop lightly on your feet, safe and unshaken, you will dazzle the people and command their instant belief. The pinnacle, Jesus! If you do that, you will win their belief in you, as Messiah."

That they may believe!

The point and appeal of that old temptation had lain here, that it offered Him straightaway a world that believed in Him and His claims. If He could start with the people's faith, what might He not do? The agony of the temptation lay in this that though it was the lower road, it seemed to lead more immediately to the high goal. It chimed in with His own dreams—a world that believed in Him, and a world that He could therefore redeem. At that moment in the Desert, He wondered if any means that could bring the world to God might not be justified. He would have done anything—almost anything—to win their belief.

If only He could get the world to believe in His message!

The scene has changed. It is no longer the Desert but the Cross. Yet the temptation is the same.

Listen!

"Let Christ the King of Israel descend now from the cross, that we may see and believe."

As these words reached His ears, they were more than a cruel taunt. They suggested, in a flashing temptation, a last glorious possibility! Here in this dramatic moment, surrounded by these gaping crowds, He was offered a unique chance. If by God's great power He now chose to avail Himself of the resources of Almighty God, He might use this occasion to win an unimpeachable belief. Hereafter, no one could ever deny that He was the messenger of God! If the Father were now made manifest in this startling and convincing fashion, every soul now before Him would be struck dumb with awe and holy fear. God would be glorified. God's power and truth would be established. Jesus would now command the adoring faith of a smitten world.

I said an *unimpeachable* belief. But would it be unimpeachable?

Would they believe if He worked this last dramatic dénouement? Even at the last, would they believe?

Perhaps . . . if He . . . what a unique chance!

It is the old temptation in a more dramatic form.

And remember, Satan can often speak by the mouth of a High Priest.

II

I hold that this presents us with Christ's last dilemma. The appeal of it lies in that mocking cry "That we may believe."

What would He do?

On the one hand, we have His own conviction that He actually possessed all the power of God. If you care, you may deny that He had this power: but you cannot deny that *He believed He had it.* Even in the Court-room before Pilate, He stated that He could call down, if need be, all the hosts of God to His service. He was conscious of God's peculiar power within Him, in ways that we cannot grasp. Whatever He believed, He believed at least in His own *power.*

Suppose for a moment—do not think it wild or ridiculous—suppose for a moment, that Christ *did* call upon God. Suppose—"that we may believe"—He claimed God's majesty in awful ways, and implored God, to whom all things are possible, to focus in Him at that moment all the mysterious spiritual resources that we feel around us. Suppose He did summon the eternal might of eternal God to His side in this dread moment!

"Come down, that we may believe," they cried.

If, as He Himself trusted, Christ could really

"command" God and could effect by God's power what we foolishly call a miracle—a name that only cloaks our ignorance of unseen things—this was a dramatic moment. The plea was surely one that would touch and draw our Lord's heart. A dream of a believing world!

Suppose then for one fierce moment that the mocking taunt of the Priests touched Him! Suppose that He summoned the Almighty Power of God! *Suppose that He came down from the cross.*

"That we may believe."

The taunt has hardly passed from their lips. The jeer is still twisting their faces.

Then the great thing happened!

They looked. . . . Amazement carved the jeer into frozen wrinkles on their faces, like the grin on a gargoyle. Their eyes stood glazed with terror.

The cross was empty.

O God, the cross was empty!

And there beside them, with the red holes in His hands, stood the man whom they had mocked.

"That we may believe," they had said.

Would they have believed? The only conceivable motive that might have influenced Christ's heart was His desire to convince the world. *Would He have convinced the world?*

1. In the first place, the Priests would not have believed.

Neither would I.

They and I might have believed that Jesus was a man of magic and could do marvellous things: but His descent from the cross would not have helped either them or me one whit to believe in His essential message, that *God is love.*

It would have proved, I admit, that God is *power!* But we knew that already. The whole visible world is a testimony to that. The stars in their courses: the swinging spheres: the mystery of growth: the miracle of life: if any man can live amid these things and not know that God is power, he is a fool. We do not need an outré thing like this descent from the cross to publish or prove the might and the majesty of God.

But nothing of Christ's essential message about God's heart and God's redemption could have been proved by any display of magical force. Indeed, it would have been the reverse. He would have dazzled the people: He would have struck them stupid with gross astonishment: He would have had them gaping open-mouthed at Him as if He were a freak. But no juggler's trick would ever induce any sane man to believe in the real message of the heart of God. There is only one thing in this world that can prove and establish *love.* And that is sacrifice! It is the only proof of love. As He hung there on the cross He was

provin w. To descend would have been to disprov

That is why He died!

Long ago, in speaking to the people, Jesus had answered His own dilemma.

He had been telling them a story of a rich man and a poor man called Lazarus. When the rich man died, he descended into Satan's kingdom. In the story, Jesus tells how this rich man besought Abraham to send a messenger to earth to warn the man's brothers, lest they should come to an end like his. Send some one that they may be forewarned in time, and may repent and believe. ("That they may believe.") But Abraham replied, "They have Moses and the prophets—all that anybody else has!—let them hear them." But the man said, "Nay, father Abraham: but if one went to them from the dead, they will repent." And Abraham said unto him, "If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead."

Aye, though one descended from the cross! Even that would not lead them to *believe!*

2. Miracles do not establish truth.

That is why Jesus never wrought them, except for sheer mercy's sake. All the miracles in the world would not have proved Him to be the messenger of God's love. For all that a miracle proves

is itself, nothing more. It is pitiable to see how some people quote the miracles of Jesus as if they proved that He is the messenger of God's truth. The miracles do not prove Him: He proves the miracles.

For instance, a man makes a statement to me which he sees that I do not credit. Then he adds, "In order to prove that what I say is true, I shall now work a miracle. I shall put up my right hand, and catch hold of that star. Then when I have shown you it lying, nestling like an egg, in my hand, I shall whistle it back to its old place. There! Now, when you have seen that, do you believe me? Do you believe that what I say is true?"

And all I could do would be to shake my head and say, "My dear sir, though you could juggle with a million suns and stars, that would not prove that what you say is true. It only proves that you are a juggler. That is all!"

A thing can only be proved true in one way—*by being proved true!* A man might work a thousand miracles, and yet be a first-class liar.

And Christ's message of the love of the redeeming heart of God would not have been established though He had descended from the cross ten times instead of once. It would have proved—what I knew already—that God holds all power in His hands. But it would not have proved that He has all love in His heart!

3. Jesus had settled this precise temptation for Himself years ago.

He had settled it, as I showed, in the Desert. There He had debated with Himself how He might win the world for God. Could He win it by force? Or by clap-trap? Or by dazzling it into worship?

In His own extreme agony, He had settled that He must win it by ordinary means,—by reason, by argument, by pleading, by teaching, by service. He had emptied Himself of all other power, and He stood forth declaring the simple message of God's love. That, and that only.

But more! He actually believed that He could prove God's love best by His own sacrifice. If therefore, in the midst of His sacrifice, He used God's power to astonish and dazzle men, His sacrifice would be a plain farce. Having once put Himself in the hands of men, He must leave Himself there.

So He settled His last dilemma.

They cried to Him, "Come down, that we may believe."

Thou knowest, O God, how much He wanted them to believe! It was the burning passion of His life. But He would not have them believe in Him, just because He could juggle with miracles or because He could ascend or descend from the cross, as if it were a Jacob's ladder.

I never accept Jesus because of His miracles. Do you? I accept His miracles because of Him.

He is the biggest miracle of all, and greater than any deed He ever wrought.

And it is here that I see the miracle of Him supremely. That He, so conscious within Him of all the coursing power of God, gave Himself into the hands of men and died on a cross for me!

They cried aloud for the miracle of power. They did not know they were seeing the greater miracle of love.

"He gave Himself a ransom for many."

I believe in Him today not in spite of, but because of, that cross at which they jeered.

III

The sublimity of His sacrifice is shown in one little incident of that last hour.

As they prepared Him for His cross, they brought Him a drink of myrrh and wine. This represented a type of rough mercy. The drink acted as a kind of mild anæsthetic, and helped to drug the pain. In a merciless age, it was a symptom of redeeming thoughtfulness.

We read that when He had tasted it, He refused to drink.

Why?

We know that it would have deadened His pain, and helped to relieve Him of some little part of His suffering. Why did He put aside this kindly cup?

Because He had already accepted another cup.

He had taken it into His hands in the Garden of Pain. The Father's cup! And He now resolved, in the majesty of His sacrifice, to die with unclouded senses and carry His load with an undimmed mind.

"Come down from the cross, that we may see and believe."

How could one who accepted the cross as God's Will, dream of evading it thus? At this stage, He could only command the world's belief by bearing the world's cross.

This is the last phase of His dilemma settled.

He gave Himself now with an unclouded soul into the arms of God.

"It is finished."

And He bowed His head, and gave up the ghost.

THE END

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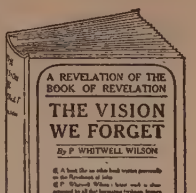

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